

Plus-Minus Grading – UGC Report to the Faculty Senate

March 10, 2009

After the issue of plus/minus grading was raised in the Faculty Senate meeting of February 10, 2009, the Undergraduate Council, as requested, discussed the issue of plus/minus grading at our February 26, 2009, meeting. We also checked the minutes from the 2002 UGC meetings at which plus/minus grading was discussed, and asked for a summary of the earlier discussions from a former member of the UGC (since none of the current members were on the Council at that time).

In reviewing the matter, it became clear that any grading policy change has far-reaching consequences. Given the number of constituencies affected, this policy decision is outside the scope of the UGC. We recommend that if the Faculty Senate wants this issue to be revisited, it should create an ad hoc committee with, at a minimum, representation from UGC, Graduate Council, OIT, the Registrar's office, and the Student Association.

Here is a summary of the issues that were raised:

- Should plus/minus grades be factored into the GPA? If they are, then the effect on students' GPAs could be negative (and will certainly be negative if we only have A- grades but not A+ grades). In addition, all gateway/GPA-dependent policies (such as scholarship requirements) would need to be revisited. College Park solves this problem by including plus/minus grades on the transcript, but *not* factoring them into the GPA computation. After several years of this policy, they performed a statistical analysis to measure the effect of plus/minus grading on various student outcomes. They concluded that factoring plus/minus grades into GPAs would have an overall negative impact on student GPAs (and other outcomes such as dismissals and graduation rates), and so the continued policy is not to include plus/minus grades in the GPA.
- Presumably the undergraduate and graduate plus/minus systems should be the same (both for logistical purposes, and because undergraduates frequently take graduate classes). Our understanding is that plus/minus grading *will* go into effect for graduate students with the SA system, but nobody in the room had any information about the specifics of that transition.
- The exact plus/minus system needs to be determined. (In the motion that was made in the UGC 2002, for example, the only grades included would be A, B+, B, B-, C+, C, D, and F; grades of A+, A-, C-, and D/F ± were not included.) If the GPA *is* affected, the weights of each grade would need to be specified.
- Certain departmental and university policies would need to be revisited in the context of plus/minus grading. (For example, would receiving a C- in a course count for a GFR requirement, or to satisfy a prerequisite?)
- In the 2002 discussions, some faculty expressed concern that it would be too difficult to determine grades under a plus/minus system. This seems like a strawman argument, since faculty would still have the option *not* to give plus/minus grades. (Other faculty determine and track student grades based on a 0-100 scale to start with; for these instructors, plus/minus grading does not require any additional work, and allows them to give more feedback about the actual performance of the students in the class.)