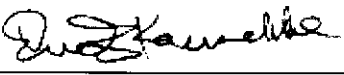




NOV 11 2011

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SENATE LEGISLATION APPROVAL

<b>Date:</b>	November 10, 2011
<b>To:</b>	Wallace D. Loh
<b>From:</b>	Eric Kasischke Chair, University Senate 
<b>Subject:</b>	Proposal to Review the University of Maryland Policies Concerning Academic Transcripts and Calculation of Grade Point Average
<b>Senate Document #:</b>	10-11-11


I am pleased to forward for your consideration the attached legislation entitled, "Proposal to Review the University of Maryland Policies Concerning Academic Transcripts and Calculation of Grade Point Average." Robert Buchanan, Chair of the Academic Procedures and Standards (APAS) Committee, presented the proposal. The University Senate approved the proposal at its November 9, 2011 meeting.

We request that you inform the Senate Office of your decision as well as any subsequent action related to your conclusion.

Enclosure: Proposal to Review the University of Maryland Policies Concerning Academic Transcripts and Calculation of Grade Point Average  
Senate Document # 10-11-11

EK/rm

- Cc: Ann Wylie, Senior Vice President & Provost
- Reka Montfort, Executive Secretary and Director, University Senate
- Juan Uriagereka, Associate Provost for Faculty Affairs
- Terry Roach, Executive Assistant to the President
- Janet Turnbull, President's Legal Office
- Elizabeth Beise, Associate Provost for Academic Planning & Programs
- Sylvia B. Andrews, Academic Affairs

Approved:   
Wallace D. Loh  
President

Date: 11/21/11



## University Senate TRANSMITTAL FORM

<b>Senate Document #:</b>	10-11-11
<b>PCC ID #:</b>	N/A
<b>Title:</b>	Proposal to Review the University of Maryland Policies Concerning Academic Transcripts and Calculation of Grade Point Average
<b>Presenter:</b>	Robert L. Buchanan, Chair, Senate APAS Committee
<b>Date of SEC Review:</b>	Monday, October 24, 2011
<b>Date of Senate Review:</b>	Wednesday, November 9 , 2011
<b>Voting (highlight one):</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. On resolutions or recommendations one by one, or</li> <li>2. In a single vote</li> <li>3. To endorse entire report</li> </ol>
<b>Statement of Issue:</b>	<p>At the beginning of the 2010-2011 academic year, the Senate Executive Committee (SEC) charged the Academic Procedures and Standards (APAS) Committee with reviewing the University of Maryland Policies Concerning Academic Transcript and Calculation of Grade Point (GPA) Average. The SEC asked APAS to make a recommendation concerning whether or not the University should reconsider its grading system. While the University Senate voted in December 2005 to adopt a plus/minus grading system, and the President approved the policy, implementation of the system was delayed by the Office of the Provost in 2006. The plus/minus grading system has not yet been implemented. Currently, the University gives faculty the option of issuing plus/minus grades, but they are not included in the calculation of GPA. The Provost has now created an implementation plan for the transition to plus/minus grading, as requested by the APAS Committee.</p>
<b>Relevant Policy # &amp; URL:</b>	III-6.00(A) UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND POLICIES CONCERNING ACADEMIC TRANSCRIPTS AND CALCULATION OF GRADE POINT AVERAGE, <a href="http://www.president.umd.edu/policies/iii600a.html">http://www.president.umd.edu/policies/iii600a.html</a>

<p><b>Recommendation:</b></p>	<p>The APAS Committee recommends that the University utilize the implementation plan as developed by the Office of the Provost for the transition to plus/minus grading. APAS fully endorses the Provost's Implementation Plan.</p> <p>The APAS Committee recommends that the 2005 policy be amended to reflect that an A+ be calculated as a 4.0.</p> <p>Credits completed with grades of A+, A, A-, B+, B, B-,C+, C, C-, D+, D, D- and F, but not P and S, shall be used in computation of the semester and cumulative GPA with values of:</p> <table data-bbox="597 646 1177 829"> <tr> <td><b>A+ = 4.0</b></td> <td><b>A = 4.0</b></td> <td><b>A- = 3.7</b></td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>B+ = 3.3</b></td> <td><b>B = 3.0</b></td> <td><b>B- = 2.7</b></td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>C+ = 2.3</b></td> <td><b>C = 2.0</b></td> <td><b>C- = 1.7</b></td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>D+ = 1.3</b></td> <td><b>D = 1.0</b></td> <td><b>D- = 0.7</b></td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td><b>F = 0</b></td> <td></td> </tr> </table> <p>The APAS Committee recommends that full implementation of plus/minus grading take place at the beginning of the Fall 2012 semester.</p>	<b>A+ = 4.0</b>	<b>A = 4.0</b>	<b>A- = 3.7</b>	<b>B+ = 3.3</b>	<b>B = 3.0</b>	<b>B- = 2.7</b>	<b>C+ = 2.3</b>	<b>C = 2.0</b>	<b>C- = 1.7</b>	<b>D+ = 1.3</b>	<b>D = 1.0</b>	<b>D- = 0.7</b>		<b>F = 0</b>	
<b>A+ = 4.0</b>	<b>A = 4.0</b>	<b>A- = 3.7</b>														
<b>B+ = 3.3</b>	<b>B = 3.0</b>	<b>B- = 2.7</b>														
<b>C+ = 2.3</b>	<b>C = 2.0</b>	<b>C- = 1.7</b>														
<b>D+ = 1.3</b>	<b>D = 1.0</b>	<b>D- = 0.7</b>														
	<b>F = 0</b>															
<p><b>Committee Work:</b></p>	<p>The APAS Committee began discussing this issue in September 2010. During the course of its review, the committee researched grading systems at peer institutions and reviewed the history of the topic within the Senate. The Chair of APAS also met with Provosts Favardin and Wylie to discuss considerations involved in the policy.</p> <p>Following research and deliberation, the committee determined that the current grading system is not in the best interest of the University of Maryland or its students. APAS continues to support the resolution passed by the Senate in 2005, with one change to the recommended value for an A+.</p> <p>In April 2011, APAS recommended to the SEC that the Office of the Provost develop an implementation plan for the transition to plus/minus grading. APAS developed a thorough report, which was submitted to the SEC for consideration. The SEC accepted APAS's report and voted to forward it to the Provost's Office for consideration, requesting the development of an implementation plan as outlined in the report. It was noted that the elements of such a plan should include: 1) reevaluation of the likely impact on the current student population of changing to plus/minus grading, 2) identification of criteria for readiness</p>															

	<p>for transition to plus/minus grading, and 3) a timeline for implementation, including contingency plans in case the necessary conditions are not yet present. The SEC sent the letter of request to the Provost on April 13, 2011.</p> <p>Following a review of the potential issues related to implementation of plus/minus grading, and an analysis of the potential effects on students, the Provost's Office developed an implementation plan for plus/minus grading. APAS reviewed the plan and voted unanimously in favor of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Endorsing the Provost's Implementation Plan for +/- Grading</li> <li>•Recommending that an A+ be calculated as a 4.0</li> <li>•Recommending that full implementation take place at the beginning of the Fall 2012 semester</li> </ul>
<b>Alternatives:</b>	The University could continue to prolong the implementation of a plus/minus grading system at the risk of remaining far behind its peers on this fundamental issue.
<b>Risks:</b>	There are no associated risks.
<b>Financial Implications:</b>	There are no related financial implications.
<b>Further Approvals Required:</b> <i>(*Important for PCC Items)</i>	Senate Approval, Presidential Approval.

## **Academic Procedures and Standards (APAS) Committee**

### **Report on the “Proposal to Review the University of Maryland Policies Concerning Academic Transcripts and Calculation of Grade Point Average”**

**Senate Document # 10-11-11**

**October 2011**

#### **Background**

The Academic Procedures and Standards (APAS) Committee was charged at the beginning of the Fall 2010 semester with reviewing a proposal that had been submitted by a graduate student. The proposer was concerned with the fairness of flat-grade GPA calculations. During the course of its review, the committee found that the University Senate had voted in December 2005 to adopt a weighted plus/minus grading system (“Proposal for Plus-Minus Grading with Numerical Values,” Senate Document# 99-00-56), with broad support from all constituencies. However, because of concerns over the potential impact of such a change on academic resources, student retention, and time to degree, the Office of the Provost decided in 2006 not to implement plus/minus grading at that time. Since then, the Senate has received occasional queries from both students and faculty concerning the status of plus/minus grading at Maryland, including a formal proposal received in 2010. The Senate Executive Committee (SEC) asked the APAS Committee to revisit this issue and to make a recommendation concerning whether or not the University should reconsider its current grading system.

#### **Committee Work**

The 2010-2011 APAS committee investigated grading systems at peer institutions, discussed the existing policy as a committee, and the Chair of the 2010-2011 Committee met with the Provost to discuss considerations involved in this policy. The APAS Committee members were in unanimous agreement that the current hybrid grading system is not in the best interest of the University or its students. The difference between the way that the GPA is calculated at the University of Maryland and how it is calculated elsewhere can produce confusion, and may be disadvantageous to graduates. Although it recognized the potential complications described above, the committee felt strongly that it is important to bring the University’s grading system in line with those used at other institutions. Although the 2005 Senate bill recommended that an A+ be calculated at a grade point value of 4.3, the committee noted that this would be unusual among our peer institutions.

In April 2011, the APAS Committee recommended that the Office of the Provost develop an implementation plan for the transition to plus/minus grading. The APAS Committee developed a thorough report (Attached as Appendix A), which was submitted to the SEC for consideration. The SEC accepted the APAS Committee’s report and voted to forward it to the Provost’s Office for consideration, requesting the development of an implementation plan as outlined in the report. It was noted that the

elements of such a plan should include: 1) reevaluation of the likely impact on the current student population of changing to plus/minus grading, 2) identification of criteria for readiness for transition to plus/minus grading, and 3) a timeline for implementation, including contingency plans in case the necessary conditions are not yet present. The SEC sent the letter of request to the Provost on April 13, 2011.

Following a review of the potential issues related to implementation of plus/minus grading, and an analysis of the potential effects on students, the Provost's Office developed an implementation plan for plus/minus grading. It was noted in the plan that the University should award 4.0 grade points to an A+ grade in accordance with the APAS report. This will require Senate action to amend the 2005 policy, which included 4.3 grade points for an A+. The SEC reviewed the Provost's Implementation Plan on September 7, 2011. The SEC asked APAS to review the implementation plan and submit a final report with recommendations for Senate action.

The 2011-2012 APAS Committee reviewed the Provost's plan and its recommendations for implementation at a meeting on September 8, 2011. The plan included a summary of impact on undergraduate students, a number of recommendations for implementation, a proposed process and timeline for completion, information on grading systems at leading universities, data on full distribution of grades awarded in the fall and spring semesters to undergraduate students between Fall 2006 and Fall 2010, data on the effect on cumulative GPA for entering first-year students by years completed at the University, data on the effect on cumulative GPA for entering first-year students by years completed at the University and race/ethnicity, data on the effect on cumulative GPA for entering first-year students by level of current cumulative GPA, data on the changes in the number of first-year students with a cumulative GPA below 2.0 by years completed at the University, data on changes in the number of transfer students with a cumulative GPA below 2.0 and average effect to cumulative GPA by years completed at the University, and data on the effect on cumulative GPA for entering first-year students using different methods of accounting for "A+" letter grades by years completed at the University.

At the meeting, the APAS Committee voted unanimously in favor of the following three recommendations:

- To endorse the Provost's Implementation Plan for Plus/Minus Grading
- To officially recommend that an A+ be calculated as a 4.0
- To recommend that full implementation take place at the beginning of the fall 2012 semester

Additionally, the Provost's Office sent a memo on D Grade Assessment Systems at leading universities for consideration by the APAS Committee. APAS reviewed this table at its meeting on October 12, 2011. The table illustrated the calculations for grades of D+, D, and D- at the top 25 ranked public institutions, as well as at the top 15 ranked private universities. Following discussion, no motions were made to amend the D grade calculations.

## Recommendations

It is the recommendation of the APAS Committee that the University utilize the implementation plan as developed by the Office of the Provost for the transition to plus/minus grading. APAS fully endorses the Provost's Implementation Plan.

It is the recommendation of the APAS Committee that an A+ be calculated as a 4.0.

Credits completed with grades of A+, A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, C, C-, D+, D, D- and F, but not P and S, shall be used in computation of the semester and cumulative GPA with values of:

<b>A+ = 4.0</b>	<b>A = 4.0</b>	<b>A- = 3.7</b>
<b>B+ = 3.3</b>	<b>B = 3.0</b>	<b>B- = 2.7</b>
<b>C+ = 2.3</b>	<b>C = 2.0</b>	<b>C- = 1.7</b>
<b>D+ = 1.3</b>	<b>D = 1.0</b>	<b>D- = 0.7</b>
	<b>F = 0</b>	

The APAS Committee recommends that full implementation of plus/minus grading take place at the beginning of the Fall 2012 semester.

### Appendices

#### **Appendix A** – 2010-2011 APAS Committee Report (as submitted to the SEC)

- Appendix 1 – Current University Policy
- Appendix 2 – Recommended University Policy (pending implementation review)
- Appendix 3 – Peer Institutions' Grading Scales
- Appendix 4 – References to Current Policy in the Undergraduate Catalog and the Graduate Catalog
- Appendix 5 – History and Past Review of +/- Grading
- Appendix 6 – Charge from Senate Executive Committee (SEC)
- Appendix 7 – Proposal from Graduate Student, Doctoral Candidate

#### **Appendix B** – Provost's Implementation Plan and Re-Charge from the SEC

#### **Appendix C** – Statement from the Graduate School on Plus/Minus Grading

#### **Appendix D** – Memo from the SEC on D Grade Comparison Table

**Appendix A – 2010-2011 APAS Committee Report (as submitted to the SEC)**



**University Senate  
TRANSMITTAL FORM**

<b>Senate Document #:</b>	10-11-11
<b>PCC ID #:</b>	N/A
<b>Title:</b>	Proposal to Review the University of Maryland Policies Concerning Academic Transcripts and Calculation of Grade Point Average
<b>Presenter:</b>	Charles Delwiche, Chair, Senate APAS Committee
<b>Date of SEC Review:</b>	April 8, 2011
<b>Date of Senate Review:</b>	n/a
<b>Voting (highlight one):</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. On resolutions or recommendations one by one, or</li> <li>2. In a single vote</li> <li>3. To endorse entire report</li> </ol>
<b>Statement of Issue:</b>	<p>At the beginning of the 2010-2011 academic year, the Senate Executive Committee (SEC) charged the Academic Procedures and Standards (APAS) Committee with reviewing the University of Maryland Policies Concerning Academic Transcript and Calculation of Grade Point (GPA) Average. The SEC asked APAS to make a recommendation concerning whether or not the University should reconsider its grading system. While the University Senate voted in December 2005 to adopt a +/- grading system, and the President approved the policy, implementation of the system was delayed by the Office of the Provost in 2006. The +/- grading system has not yet been implemented. Currently, the University gives faculty the option of issuing +/- grades, but they are not included in the calculation of GPA.</p>
<b>Relevant Policy # &amp; URL:</b>	<p>III-6.00(A) UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND POLICIES CONCERNING ACADEMIC TRANSCRIPTS AND CALCULATION OF GRADE POINT AVERAGE, <a href="http://www.president.umd.edu/policies/iii600a.html">http://www.president.umd.edu/policies/iii600a.html</a></p>
<b>Recommendation:</b>	<p>The APAS Committee recommends that the Office of the Provost develop an implementation plan for the transition to +/- grading as described in the attached report. The elements of such a plan should include: 1) reevaluation of the likely impact on the current student population of changing to +/- grading, 2) identification of criteria for readiness for transition to +/-</p>



	<p>grading, and 3) a timeline for implementation, including contingency plans in case the necessary conditions are not yet present.</p> <p>Given the potential complexity of implementing +/- grading, it would be advisable to formulate a joint Provost/Senate oversight committee to help define and discuss the issues, and to identify the best way to handle them. In the course of crafting this report, APAS discussed recommending that representatives from the Office of the Registrar, the Graduate Council, the Office of the Provost, the APAS Committee, the Office of Information Technology, and others who broadly represent the academic community be appointed to such a committee.</p> <p>APAS also requests by September 1, 2011, from the Office of the Provost, an implementation plan with a timetable that includes a date for full implementation.</p>
<p><b>Committee Work:</b></p>	<p>The APAS Committee began discussing this issue in September 2010. During the course of its review, the committee researched grading systems at peer institutions and reviewed the history of the topic within the Senate. The Chair of APAS also met with Provosts Favardin and Wylie to discuss considerations involved in the policy.</p> <p>Following research and deliberation, the committee determined that the current grading system is not in the best interest of the University of Maryland or its students. APAS continues to support the resolution passed by the Senate in 2005, with one change to the recommended value for an A+. On March 10, 2011, the APAS Committee voted unanimously to put forward the recommendations contained in the attached report.</p>
<p><b>Alternatives:</b></p>	<p>The University could continue to prolong the implement of a +/- grading system at the risk of remaining far behind our peers on this fundamental issue.</p>
<p><b>Risks:</b></p>	<p>There are no associated risks.</p>
<p><b>Financial Implications:</b></p>	<p>There are no related financial implications.</p>
<p><b>Further Approvals Required:</b> <i>(*Important for PCC Items)</i></p>	<p>Senate Executive Committee Approval, Provost Approval</p>

## **Academic Procedures and Standards (APAS) Committee**

### **Report on the “Proposal to Review the University of Maryland Policies Concerning Academic Transcripts and Calculation of Grade Point Average”**

**Senate Document # 10-11-11**

**March 2011**

#### **Background**

The University Senate voted in December 2005 to adopt a +/- grading system (“Proposal for Plus-Minus Grading with Numerical Values,” Senate Document 99-00-56), with broad support from all constituencies, and the President approved the policy. The Office of the Provost decided in 2006 to delay implementation of +/- grading at that time because of concerns over the potential impact of such a change on academic resources, student retention, and time to degree. Since then, the Senate has received occasional queries from both students and faculty concerning the status of +/- grading at Maryland, including a formal proposal received in 2010 (Appendix 7). The Senate Executive Committee (SEC) charged the Academic Procedures and Standards committee (APAS) with revisiting the matter of +/- grading and making a recommendation concerning whether or not the University should reconsider the Maryland grading system. The SEC requested that the APAS Committee review the entire history and past reviews of this topic. The SEC specifically asked APAS to comment on whether the current process is appropriate, compare the University’s existing practice to those at our peer institutions, and recommend changes to the current policy as appropriate.

APAS investigated grading systems at our peer institutions, and discussed the existing policy as a committee. APAS also reviewed the history of this topic (Appendix 5). The Chair of the APAS Committee also met with Provosts Favardin and Wylie to discuss considerations involved in this policy.

Grading policy at the University of Maryland currently gives faculty the option of issuing +/- grades, but these are not included in the calculation of the GPA (Grade Point Average), such that A+, A, and A- all contribute 4.0 grade points to the GPA, and similarly B+, B, and B- 3.0, C+, C, and C- 2.0, D+, D, and D- 1.0, and F 0. This is a strikingly different grading system from that used at any of the Maryland Peer Institutions (Appendix 3), all of which differentiate between + and – grades in the GPA, most with an offset of 0.3 grade point units (except for A+, which is calculated as 4.0, the same as an A, at most peer institutions). Another important observation is that graduate and professional programs often recalculate GPA from the transcript, so a student’s GPA as calculated by the University of Maryland is often at variance with how it appears to other institutions.

It is also important to recognize that the transition from one system of calculating GPA to another may be expected to have a variety of effects, some of which may be difficult to anticipate. One important effect would be on program requirements. Many programs

define acceptable performance in terms of a calculation of overall GPA, or GPA for courses that are required for the program. Consequently, changing the way in which GPA is calculated will change the *de facto* requirements of many individual programs, while those programs that define their grade requirements in terms of specific grades may be unaffected. Thus a change in grading systems would be expected to have a heterogeneous effect on different programs.

This is not simply a matter of technical qualifications. If the boundary between satisfactory and unsatisfactory performance is changed, then it may be necessary to add instructional resources to permit students to repeat courses in a way that would not have been necessary before the change. Furthermore, because there are demographic differences in overall grade performance, this effect would not be uniformly distributed across the University community.

### **Committee Findings**

APAS is in unanimous agreement that the current hybrid grading system is not in the best interest of the University of Maryland or its students. Grades are intended to be comparative measures, and using a fundamentally different grading system than is in use at most other institutions is intrinsically problematic. The comparative use of grades includes, but is not limited to: students' own use in monitoring their performance over time and among different subjects; the institution's use in comparing performance within and among students, programs, and cohorts; and other institutions use in assigning transfer credits, determining admissions, and assessing other aspects of student performance over time. The difference between the way in which GPA is calculated at Maryland and how it is calculated elsewhere can produce confusion, and is probably disadvantageous to graduates. Although it recognized the potential complications described above, the committee felt strongly that it is important to bring the University's grading system in line with those used at other institutions.

The primary matter of concern is the transition from one grading system to another; +/- grade systems are in nearly universal use and are well accepted elsewhere, so there is no reason to believe that there would be long-term adverse consequences of adopting +/- grading. It is vital to develop a mechanism to permit individual programs to adjust their requirements to minimize adverse effects of the transition.

In anticipation of possible difficulties, APAS discussed the interpretation of specific grades. In particular, APAS noted that at most peer institutions a C- appears to be regarded as satisfactory for individual courses required by a given program (including general programs), and that D- is generally required as satisfactory for credit toward degree in fully elective courses. A requirement to maintain an overall GPA of 2.0 for graduation is typical for undergraduate degrees, and 3.0 typical for graduate degrees. Furthermore, APAS noted that although the 2005 Senate bill recommended that an A+ be calculated at a grade point value of 4.3, this would be unusual among our peer institutions. APAS also noted that not all aspects of +/- grading have to be implemented simultaneously. The committee recommends that students graduating within five years

of admission have their programmatic requirements be calculated according to the system in use at the time of their matriculation. This may mean that during the implementation period the transcript should show the GPA calculated in two different ways.

## **Recommendations**

Consequently, it is the recommendation of APAS that the Office of the Provost develop an implementation plan for the transition to +/- grading. The elements of such a plan should include: 1) reevaluation of the likely impact on the current student population of changing to +/- grading, 2) identification of criteria for readiness for transition to +/- grading, and 3) a timeline for implementation, including contingency plans in case the necessary conditions are not yet present. Given the potential complexity of implementing +/- grading, it would be advisable to formulate a joint Provost/Senate oversight committee to help define and discuss the issues, and to identify the best way to handle them. APAS also requests by September 1, 2011, from the Office of the Provost, an implementation plan with a timetable that includes a date for full implementation.

## Appendices

Appendix 1 – Current University Policy

Appendix 2 – Recommended University Policy (pending implementation review)

Appendix 3 – Peer Institutions' Grading Scales

Appendix 4 – References to Current Policy in the Undergraduate Catalog and the Graduate Catalog

Appendix 5 – History and Past Review of +/- Grading

Appendix 6 – Charge from Senate Executive Committee (SEC)

Appendix 7 – Proposal from Graduate Student, Doctoral Candidate

## Appendix 1 – Current University Policy

III-6.00(A) UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND POLICIES CONCERNING  
ACADEMIC TRANSCRIPTS AND CALCULATION OF GRADE  
POINT AVERAGE

APPROVED BY THE PRESIDENT 1 AUGUST 1991; updated  
June 8, 2001 Effective Fall 2001; amended April  
14, 2010

### I. Policy

For the policy on resident credit, see III-7.00(A)  
University of Maryland Degree Requirements.

Credits completed with grades of A+, A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, C, C-, D+, D, D- and F, but not P and S, shall be used in computation of the semester and cumulative GPA with values of 4.00 (A+,A,A-), 3.00 (B+,B,B-), 2.00(C+,C,C-), 1.00 (D+,D,D-) and 0.00 respectively. A grade of XF shall be computed in the same manner as a grade of F. Marks of I, P, S, W and NGR will not be used in the computation of semester and cumulative GPA.

**Appendix 2 – Recommended University Policy (pending implementation review)**

**Changes Listed in Blue/Bold Font**

III-6.00(A) UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND POLICIES CONCERNING  
ACADEMIC TRANSCRIPTS AND CALCULATION OF GRADE  
POINT AVERAGE

APPROVED BY THE PRESIDENT 1 AUGUST 1991; updated  
June 8, 2001 Effective Fall 2001; amended April  
14, 2010

I. Policy

For the policy on resident credit, see III-7.00(A)  
University of Maryland Degree Requirements.

Credits completed with grades of A+, A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, C,  
C-, D+, D, D- and F, but not P and S, shall be used in  
computation of the semester and cumulative GPA with values  
of:

<b>A+ = 4.0</b>	<b>A = 4.0</b>	<b>A- = 3.7</b>
<b>B+ = 3.3</b>	<b>B = 3.0</b>	<b>B- = 2.7</b>
<b>C+ = 2.3</b>	<b>C = 2.0</b>	<b>C- = 1.7</b>
<b>D+ = 1.3</b>	<b>D = 1.0</b>	<b>D- = 0.7</b>
	<b>F = 0</b>	

~~4.00 (A+, A, A-), 3.00 (B+, B, B-), 2.00 (C+, C, C-), 1.00  
(D+, D, D-) and 0.00 respectively.~~ A grade of XF shall be  
computed in the same manner as a grade of F. Marks of I, P,  
S, W and NGR will not be used in the computation of  
semester and cumulative GPA.

### Appendix 3 – Peer Institutions' Grading Scales

#### University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Grade	Grade Points	Grade	Grade Points
A+	4.00	C+	2.33
A	4.00	C	2.00
A-	3.67	C-	1.67
B+	3.33	D+	1.33
B	3.00	D	1.00
B-	2.67	D-	.67
		F	0.00

#### University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Grade	Grade Points	Grade	Grade Points
A+	<i>Not used (except by Law School)</i>	C+	2.3
A	4.0	C	2.0
A-	3.7	C-	1.7
B+	3.3	D+	1.3
B	3.0	D	1.0
B-	2.7	D-	<i>Not used</i>
		F	0.0

#### University of California, Berkeley

Grade	Grade Points	Grade	Grade Points
A+	4.0	C+	2.3
A	4.0	C	2.0
A-	3.7	C-	1.7
B+	3.3	D+	1.3
B	3.0	D	1.0
B-	2.7	D-	0.7
		F	0.0

### University of California, Los Angeles

Grade	Grade Points	Grade	Grade Points
A+	4.0	C+	2.3
A	4.0	C	2.0
A-	3.7	C-	1.7
B+	3.3	D+	1.3
B	3.0	D	1.0
B-	2.7	D-	0.7
		F	0.0

### University of Michigan

Grade	Grade Points	Grade	Grade Points
A+	4.0	C+	2.3
A	4.0	C	2.0
A-	3.7	C-	1.7
B+	3.3	D+	1.3
B	3.0	D	1.0
B-	2.7	D-	0.7
		F	0.0



## **Appendix 4 – References to Current Policy in the Undergraduate Catalog and the Graduate Catalog**

### **Undergraduate Catalog, 2010-2011:**

#### **Registration, Academic Requirements, and Regulations**

##### **Grade Point Average, Computation of**

GPA is computed by dividing the total number of quality points accumulated in courses for which a grade of A+, A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, C, C-, D+, D, D-, or F has been assigned by the total number of credits attempted in those courses. Courses for which a mark of P, S, I, NGR or W has been assigned are not included in computing the GPA. Each letter grade has a numerical value: A+, A, A- = 4; B+, B, B- = 3; C+, C, C- = 2; D+, D, D- = 1; F = 0. Multiplying this value by the number of credits for a particular course gives the number of quality points earned for that course.

See Repeat Policy to determine the effect of repeated courses in the calculation of GPA.

### **The Graduate Catalog, University of Maryland, Fall 2010-Spring 2011:**

#### **Academic Policies: General Policies and The Academic Record**

##### **Grade Point Average Computation**

The A is calculated at 4 quality points, B at 3 quality points and C at 2 quality points. The grades of D, F and I receive no quality points. Students do not earn credit toward the degree for courses in which they receive a grade of D or F. For graduate students, all courses taken that are numbered 400 and above (except 500-level courses, those numbered 799, 898, or 899, and those graded with an S) will be used in the calculation of the grade point average. A student may repeat a course in an effort to earn a better grade. Whether higher or lower, the most recent grade will be used in computing the grade point average. Grades for graduate students remain as part of the student's permanent record. Changes in previously recorded grades may be made if timely (within one semester) and if the original instructor certifies that an actual mistake was made in determining or recording the grade. The change must be approved by the department chair and the Dean of the Graduate School. Graduate credit transferred from another institution will not be included in the calculation of the grade point average.

## Appendix 5 – History and Past Reviews of +/- Grading

In July 1999, Provost Geoffroy assembled a ten-member Task Force on Grading to examine the current grading system and weigh the pros and cons of changing to a plus/minus system. The Task Force included faculty, staff, and students. The Task Force conducted a thorough and thoughtful review of the University's current grading system, the grading system of our peers, the effects of adopting a plus-minus system, and the projected costs of such a change. In the course of their study, the Task Force also canvassed large numbers of students and faculty for their opinions. The report concludes that the University would benefit from including plus and minus symbols in its grading.

The Task Force on Grading gave a report (as an informational item) at the Senate Meeting on February 3, 2000.

The SEC met on March 28, 2000 and reviewed amendments to the report.

The report was approved (as amended) on April 6, 2000.

In April 2000, Dean Hampton sent a memo to the faculty explaining that pluses and minuses will be visible on the official student transcript, but not factored into the overall GPA. Implementation of this phase will be in Fall 2001. (*The University's current policy "III-6.20(A) University of Maryland Grading Symbols and Notations Used on Academic Transcripts became effective Fall 2001*).

An ad hoc group from Undergraduate Studies, headed by the Registrar's Office, met to set guidelines for reviewing the data during the 2000-2001 academic year to determine the possible impact of plus-minus grading if the pluses and minuses were given full weight.

In November 2003, the Registrar issued a report on the impact and implications of plus-minus grading. The SEC discussed the report at its meeting on December 18, 2003.

The Educational Affairs Committee passed a proposal for plus-minus grading with numerical values at its October 31, 2005 meeting. The committee developed a list of FAQs to be presented with the report to the Senate on December 12, 2005.

The Senate approved the Proposal for Plus-Minus Grading with Numerical Values from the Senate Educational Affairs Committee (Chaired by John Newhagen) on December 12, 2005.

President Mote approved the Proposal for Plus-Minus Grading with Numerical Values (99-00-56) on April 26, 2006.

Implementation was delayed until issues with respect to the application of the policy to academic requirements of undergraduate and graduate programs could be resolved. On April 26, 2006, the President asked the Provost and the Senate to appoint a task

force charged with completing a detailed analysis of the issues, drafting an implementation plan, and, if necessary, proposing revisions to the policy. In the interim, the current grading policy remained in effect.

In May 2006, Associate Provost Phyllis Peres sent an email to the Campus Community about the delay in implementation of the new plus-minus grading policy. The email explained that Provost Destler appointed an implementation team to plan the fine points of putting the policy into effect. She stated that based on new data that emerged during their review, the President, the Provost, and the Chair of the Senate recommend that implementation of the policy be postponed pending completion of a thorough analysis of the policy's short- and long-term effects on all students.

On May 2, 2006, the Senate Executive Committee nominated members for the Task Force on Plus-Minus Grading. The nominees were submitted to the Provost's Office.

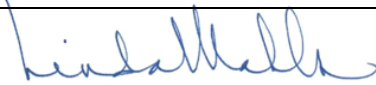
The first meeting of the Task Force was proposed for Fall 2006. Provost Destler was scheduled to attend the February 1, 2007 SEC meeting to discuss problems of implementation.

On February 1, 2007 Destler referred to a study that impacted a decision on plus-minus grading. It showed that if the policy were implemented, the overall graduation rate would go down by 2%. For minorities, the graduation rate would go down by 5%. He proposed an alternate approach. Students could log on to Testudo and request an unofficial record of the GPA with quality points for the pluses and minuses. This recalculation would not be official, and it would not appear on the transcript. The SGA and the Provost's Student Advisory Committee endorsed this proposal as an interim solution. It could be implemented in the Fall 2007. The SEC agreed unanimously for this to be used temporarily. A Task Force would not be formed.

On March 12, 2007, Provost Destler reported to the Senate about the issues he expressed to the SEC. He announced a delay of two years in the implementation of plus-minus grading.



**University Senate  
CHARGE**

<b>Date:</b>	September 28, 2010
<b>To:</b>	Charles Delwiche Chair, Academic Procedures & Standards Committee
<b>From:</b>	Linda Mabbs Chair, University Senate 
<b>Subject:</b>	Proposal to Review the University of Maryland Policies Concerning Academic Transcripts and Calculations of Grade Point Average
<b>Senate Document #:</b>	10-11-11
<b>Deadline:</b>	March 1, 2011

The Senate Executive Committee (SEC) requests that the Academic Procedures & Standards (APAS) Committee review the attached proposal regarding revisions to the University of Maryland Policies Concerning Academic Transcripts and Calculation of Grade Point Average (GPA) (III-6.00(A)). This proposal raises concerns about the fairness of flat-grade GPA calculations.

The Senate approved the proposal entitled, "Proposal for Plus-Minus Grading with Numerical Values" (Senate Document # 99-00-56) at its December 12, 2005 meeting. President Mote approved the proposal but subsequently raised several concerns about implementation. There was discussion of a Joint Provost/Senate Task Force to review these concerns, however, Provost Destler reported to both the SEC and the Senate that plus-minus grading would negatively impact minorities and the disadvantaged. He proposed an alternative approach where students could log on to Testudo and request an unofficial record of the GPA with quality points for pluses and minuses. This recalculation would not be official, and it would not appear on the transcript. The Provost's Student Advisory Committee and the Student Government Association endorsed Destler's proposal as an interim solution to the problem.

The SEC requests that the committee review the entire history and past reviews of this topic. It has been five years since the initial approval of the proposal. The interim solution was intended to be temporary, and the SEC feels that a review of the current policy is warranted. Therefore, we ask that the APAS Committee review the implementation of the approved proposal and the interim solution.

Specifically, we ask that you:

1. Comment on whether the current process is appropriate.

2. Compare our existing practice to those at our peer institutions.
3. Recommend changes to the existing policy if appropriate.

We ask that you submit your report and recommendations to the Senate Office no later than March 1, 2011. If you have questions or need assistance, please contact Reka Montfort in the Senate Office, extension 5-5804.



**University Senate  
PROPOSAL FORM**

<b>Name:</b>	Jamison Kantor
<b>Date:</b>	8/8/10
<b>Title of Proposal:</b>	Reform to policy III-6.00(A): UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND POLICIES CONCERNING ACADEMIC TRANSCRIPTS AND CALCULATION OF GRADE POINT AVERAGE
<b>Phone Number:</b>	585-355-2989
<b>Email Address:</b>	<a href="mailto:jkantor@umd.edu">jkantor@umd.edu</a>
<b>Campus Address:</b>	Tawes 2200
<b>Unit/Department/College:</b>	English/ARHU
<b>Constituency (faculty, staff, undergraduate, graduate):</b>	Graduate Student – Doctoral Candidate
<b>Description of issue/concern/policy in question:</b>	Fairness of flat-grade GPA calculations. Pernicious academic culture created by such calculations. See supporting material.
<b>Description of action/changes you would like to see implemented and why:</b>	Implementation of a more nuanced calculations (taking account of “+” and “-” reflected in 1/3 point increments). Would be more accurate and fair, and could promote a healthier academic environment. See supporting material.
<b>Suggestions for how your proposal could be put into practice:</b>	Simply revise the policy to calculate student’s grade accounting for 1/3 point increments. The calculation method is widely practiced. See supporting material.

<b>Additional Information:</b>	If possible, would love to discuss this issue at a University Senate hearing.
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***Please send your completed form and any supporting documents to [senate-admin@umd.edu](mailto:senate-admin@umd.edu) or University of Maryland Senate Office, 1100 Marie Mount Hall, College Park, MD 20742-7541. Thank you!***

Proposal to Reform Policy

III-6.00(A): UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND POLICIES CONCERNING ACADEMIC  
TRANSCRIPTS AND CALCULATION OF GRADE POINT AVERAGE

APPROVED BY THE PRESIDENT 1 AUGUST 1991; updated June 8, 2001. Effective Fall  
2001; amended April 14, 2010

I. Policy

...

Credits completed with grades of A+, A, A!, B+, B, B!, C+, C, C!, D+, D, D! and F, but not P and S, shall be used in computation of the semester and cumulative GPA with values of 4.00 (A+,A,A-), 3.00 (B+,B,B-!), 2.00(C+,C,C-!), 1.00 (D+,D,D-!) and 0.00 respectively. A grade of XF shall be computed in the same manner as a grade of F. Marks of I, P, S, W and NGR will not be used in the computation of semester and cumulative GPA.

~

The University of Maryland at College Park has implemented many transcript methods that fairly account for student performance in the classroom. For instance, the recent adoption of the “XF” grade has allowed faculty to firmly censure academic dishonesty, whereas a single-sanction policy can often be ruthless or discordant with the offense. The University has also given first-year students one opportunity to erase a bad grade from their transcripts. I would argue that this policy does less to encourage apathy, than it does to retain potentially good students who simply need a wake-up call to prioritize their studies. Both of these policies strike a delicate balance between fairly accounting for student lapses, and allowing these students an opportunity to learn from these lapses in-house.

However, the University’s flat-grading implemented on GPA calculations—where an “A+, A, and A-” gets “4.0,” a “B+, B, B-” gets “3.0,” and so on—is a transcript policy that is in serious need of revision.

To begin, the policy is clunky. It fails to account for major differences between “+” work and “-” work. And there are undeniable qualitative distinctions between “89” work “80” work. Oftentimes that difference is a mark of sustained effort and engagement. The student who begins with an 80 gains that 89 by focusing more deeply on the material, and by raising her effort throughout the semester. But short-term, the policy levels all students into a single evaluative category that erases growing competence in a subject. The opposite is also true. For instance, a student whose continued participation lapses in a discussion section results in a drop from an 87 to an 80, needs to be assigned an accurate measure of these lapses. It might be unsavory to say, but grades must also be coercive.

However, one could argue that long-term, the flat-grade policy produces negligible differences to a policy accounting for the “+” and “-”. Over time, the 90 with which I squeaked by makes up for the 89 that fell just short. Additionally, GPA’s are often recalculated by other post-graduate institutions, which use their own rules to measure candidate’s undergraduate performance. Thus,



short-term discrepancies seem to be mitigated by long-term results. We must only clearly inform our students of this fact to ensure them that their GPA is an accurate aggregate of their performance. And yet, these claims—the arithmetic defense of a flat-grading system—are easily countered by the pernicious academic culture created by such a system.


Flat-grading undoubtedly promotes a culture of “extrinsic rewards,” where students are more fixated on achieving a number (sometimes by any means necessary), than by internalizing course material. A flat-grading system encourages this fixation by giving students an all-or-nothing mentality: those on the cusp of a better grade will obsessively attempt to achieve it, those in the middle of a solid grade are perfectly content to rest there. Thus, grades begin to feel like peaks to be conquered or camped upon, not precise scales of evaluation. Beyond the detrimental extrinsic-focus it encourages in the student, flat grading undoubtedly leads to an increased practice of “grade-grubbing,” where students pressure instructors and faculty to bump grades without adequate reason. Mostly, this results in the growth of benign, irritating emails. The majority of teachers respond professionally and equitably to each one. *But some will not.* Rather than deal with the hassle of inordinate complaints, a less dedicated teacher will assign requested grades rather than earned ones. Even a *more* dedicated teacher could fall prey to the system, feeling that a student’s 88 is far more deserving of 4.0 full GPA points than the modest 3.0 an 88 confers. Finally, if the flat-grade system can be seen to encourage an all-or-nothing mentality in students, then we can be sure that it also encourages academic dishonesty. The less scrupulous student who knows that even a slight edge on their average (1%) remunerates a bigger grade is much more likely to plagiarize, cheat, and generally forego academic honor. I should note that I do not believe that the system *causes* academic dishonesty, it simply makes it more appealing.

For goals both short-term (fair evaluation) and long term (promoting a healthy academic culture), the University of Maryland needs to adopt a more nuanced system of grading. As in many institutions, grades should reflect student performance by adding or subtracting third points based on the “+” or “-”. An A- would no longer be 4.0, but a 3.66. But a B+ would no longer be a 3.0 but a 3.33. This system favorably replicates a sliding scale of assessment, and avoids the peak-and-plateau culture promoted by flat-grades. Of course, the system would offer better evaluative accuracy and fairness. But it could also result in happier teachers, less dishonesty, and students more attuned to the content of their education than the “rewards” associated with it.

## Appendix B – Provost's Implementation Plan and Re-Charge from the SEC



### University Senate CHARGE

<b>Date:</b>	September 8, 2011
<b>To:</b>	Robert Buchanan Chair, Academic Procedures & Standards Committee
<b>From:</b>	Eric Kasischke Chair, University Senate 
<b>Subject:</b>	Re-Charge: Proposal to Review the University of Maryland Policies Concerning Academic Transcripts and Calculations of Grade Point Average
<b>Senate Document #:</b>	10-11-11
<b>Deadline:</b>	September 19, 2011

The Senate Executive Committee (SEC) requests that the Academic Procedures & Standards (APAS) Committee review the attached proposed plan for implementation of the University of Maryland Policies Concerning Academic Transcripts and Calculation of Grade Point Average (III-6.00(A)).

The 2010-2011 APAS Committee recommended that the Office of the Provost develop an implementation plan for the transition to +/- grading. Specifically, it requested a re-evaluation of the likely impact on the current student population as a result of changing to +/- grading, identification of criteria for readiness for transition to +/- grading, and a timeline for implementation. In addition, the APAS Committee recommended that the value of an A+ be 4.0 rather than 4.3 as the current policy states.

Provost Wylie reviewed the committee's recommendations and reported back to the SEC on September 1, 2011. In her response, she gives an overview of her office's review of the committee's recommendation including impact on students and a timeline for implementation. In addition, Provost Wylie agreed that the University should award 4.0 grade points for an A+ grade.

The SEC requests that the APAS Committee amend the current policy as proposed in your recommendation so that an A+ is valued at 4.0 instead of 4.3.

We ask that you submit your report and recommendations to the Senate Office no later than September 19, 2011. I apologize for the short turn-around on this request but Provost Wylie's plan requires Senate action in the Fall 2011 semester in order to avoid implementation delays. If you have questions or need assistance, please contact Reka Montfort in the Senate Office, extension 5-5804.

## **Implementation Plan for Plus/Minus Grading Office of the Provost**

### **Summary and Recommendations**

The Senate Executive Committee requested that the Provost provide an implementation plan for plus/minus grading (Report of the Senate Academic Procedures and Standards (APAS) Committee). The plan analyzes effects on students and presents an implementation process.

#### **Impact on Undergraduate Students**

Plus/minus grading will result in a very small reduction in cumulative GPA, three one-hundredths of a GPA point (0.03), based on analysis of all freshmen admits and Fall transfer admits in the period 2006-2010 over their first four years of study. There are no substantive differences by race/ethnicity in GPA effects. GPA effects are almost constant across GPA levels. The principal source of a lower GPA arises because A- grades are awarded 3.7 grade points rather than 4.0. The negative effect on cumulative GPA for transfer students is also 0.03.

There is a small increase in the number of students with cumulative GPA below 2.0, approximately 0.5% of first-year students (approximately 20 students in each freshmen cohort). The number of students affected is lower for students who have progressed farther toward their degrees. Race/ethnicity differences in the increase in numbers of students with GPA below 2.0 are relatively small.

Virtually all leading universities now use plus/minus grading that includes C- grades and A+ grades. The APAS proposal awarding 4.0 grade points for an A+ is aligned with other leading public institutions. Awarding 4.3 grade points to A+ grades will reduce (but not eliminate) the small negative effect on cumulative GPAs.

A principal benefit of plus/minus grading is to provide a more accurate representation of student achievement. Associated student incentive effects are not captured in GPA comparisons in the report.

#### **Recommendations for Implementation**

1. The University should award 4.0 grade points to an A+ grade in accordance with the APAS report. This will require Senate action to amend the April 26, 2006, policy which included 4.3 grade points for an A+.
2. For currently enrolled students, cumulative GPA calculations will include grades granted under both the prior and present grading policy as of the effective date of implementation.
3. University-wide requirements currently in place for a specific letter grade will be converted to accept a minus grade. Following implementation, academic programs may

revise the letter grade requirements for specific courses, entry requirements to a program, or courses for graduation, by submitting requests through appropriate processes.

4. Senate approval of a new policy by the end of the Fall 2011 term should provide sufficient time to complete other steps for plus/minus grading to begin in Fall 2012. Delays in Senate action or academic program review and modification of course/degree requirements under the new system could delay implementation for another academic year.
5. Implementation of plus/minus grading should include all undergraduate courses. It should also include graduate courses upon the recommendation of the Graduate Council.

### **Plus/Minus Grading Effects for Undergraduates**

#### **I. Senate Proposals for Plus/Minus Grades in Grade Point Average (GPA) Calculations.**

The University Senate has twice approved plus/minus grading and its use in GPA calculations. An extensive study of plus/minus grading was conducted in years 1999-2000 by a University task force, including campus-wide discussion and surveys of undergraduate and graduate students and faculty. The proposal was passed by the Senate on April 6, 2000, and approved by President Mote on August 28, 2000. Implementation was deferred. The Senate again approved plus/minus grading on December 25, 2005, with presidential approval on April 26, 2006. Implementation was again deferred.

The Senate Academic Procedures and Standards Committee (APAS) recommendation for plus/minus grading differs from the prior Senate approved policies only by assigning 4.0 grade points for an A+ rather than 4.3 grade points. The APAS proposal is as follows:

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Grade points</b>
A+	4.0
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
D-	0.7
F	0

In the previous Senate-approved policies and in the APAS proposal, the present marking system defining the standards for letter grades is retained: A+, A, A- denotes excellent mastery of the subject and outstanding scholarship; B+, B, B- denotes good mastery of the subject and good

scholarship; C+, C, C- denotes acceptable mastery of the subject; D+, D, D- denotes borderline understanding of the subject (It denotes marginal performance, and it does not represent satisfactory progress toward a degree.); and F denotes failure to understand the subject and unsatisfactory performance. The marking system should remain unchanged.

**II. Grading Policies at Peer Institutions.** Virtually all leading (Top 25) major public universities, including our peer institutions, use plus/minus systems, typically adjusting grades 0.3 grade points up or down for plus/minus grades. (See Table 1.) Approximately one-half include the grade of A+, which is awarded 4.0 grade points. While not included in GPA calculations, the award of an A+ provides an additional indicator of excellent performance. Approximately 80% of leading public institutions include a C- grade, with a large fraction awarding 1.7 grade points. Plus/minus grading is also used in the majority of leading private universities, with many including A+ and C- grades. Adoption of the 2011 Senate APAS proposal would align the University's grading system with other major public research institutions.

**III. Static and Dynamic Effects on Students.** The effect of different policies for translating letter grades into numerical grades and cumulative GPAs can be readily compared by recalculating cumulative GPAs for any proposed policy. Three alternative policies are compared below: the present policy, Senate-approved policy, and the 2011 Senate APAS proposal. The analysis describes changes in GPAs, as well as changes in the number of students who would have a cumulative GPA below a 2.0 GPA.

The overall effect of any grading policy depends on a number of dynamic factors, most notably student reactions to the challenges and opportunities under alternative grading policies. Introduction of plus/minus grading provides additional incentives, since success (as reflected in course grades) is more precisely defined and measured. Plus/minus grading is likely to encourage students at all grade levels to strive for a higher grade. For example, a minus grade could be an insufficient grade to meet a course, department, college, or other university requirement. Simple recalculations of GPAs for a given set of grades under alternative policies do not capture these incentive effects.

**IV. GPAs for Students Entering and Completing with a Single Grading Policy.** The simplest illustration of GPA effects compares cumulative GPAs for students throughout their period of study under two alternative policies -- the University's existing policy without plus/minus grade points with the proposed policy of plus/minus grading with A and A+ grades given four grade points. Grades awarded for the period Fall 2006-Fall 2010 are used in the analysis. (A comparison of the 2000/2005 Senate policy with 4.3 awarded for A+ appears below.)

- A. **Grade Distributions at the University of Maryland.** Differences in outcomes associated with a plus/minus policy depend on the distribution of plus/minus grades at the University. If many more students receive plus rather than minus grades, calculated cumulative GPA will be increased; alternatively, a preponderance of minus grades will result in a lower cumulative GPA. Individual students will vary in the number of plus or minus grades received.

For the period Fall 2006-Fall 2010 there were more plus grades awarded to undergraduate students than minus grades at letter grades B, C, and D. Hence plus/minus grade points at these grade levels would contribute to a higher cumulative GPA. (See Table 2.) Conversely, at the A level, the proposed policy awards 3.7 points for an A-. The A- grade accounts for 14% of all undergraduate grades in this time period. Regardless whether an A+ is given 4.0 or 4.3 grade points, fewer total grade points would be awarded for grades at the A level, contributing to a lower cumulative GPA. The aggregate effect of plus/minus grading reflects the net effect of these grade patterns.

- B. GPAs for Freshmen Cohorts, Fall 2006-Fall 2010, Over Four Years of Study.** The comparison below calculates cumulative GPA effects for incoming freshmen in five entry cohorts (Fall 2006-Fall 2010) under these two policies. Analysis of cumulative GPA effects is shown by an analysis of cumulative GPAs for incoming freshmen (fall and spring admits) in five cohorts (Fall 2006-Fall 2010) as students conclude subsequent years at the University. GPA effects are shown for students at the end of each of their first four years at the University.

The average change in GPA across all students in these five cohorts at the end of their first year of study is a negative three one-hundredths of a point in GPA (-0.03). Average effects remain at this same level for the cohorts of students who have finished two years, three years, and four years. (See Table 3a.) More students in any given year will have reductions in their GPA than the number whose GPA is increased.

GPA effects of plus/minus grading are virtually identical for students across race/ethnicity categories, with an average GPA decline of -0.03 across cohorts and race/ethnicity categories. (Table 3b.)

Plus/minus grading effects on cumulative GPA for students at all GPA levels exhibit only slight differences by GPA level. Students at higher GPA levels, with GPA above 3.3, have reductions of -0.04 or -0.05. (See Table 4.) This difference likely is traceable to the larger number of A- grades received by students at higher GPA levels.

- C. Number of Students with Cumulative GPA Below 2.0.** The University requires that students must have a 2.0 overall GPA to avoid being placed on probation or being dismissed and to have an overall 2.0 GPA to graduate. Under the plus/minus grading policy, the number of students whose cumulative GPA fell below 2.0 would be slightly increased. The largest increase would occur at the conclusion of year one at the University. For the five freshmen cohorts Fall 2006-Fall 2010, an average of 20 additional students per cohort are estimated to have a cumulative GPA below 2.0, 0.5% of all students finishing their first year, under the plus/minus policy. (See Table 4.)

The additional number of students under plus/minus grading with a cumulative GPA below 2.0 would be lower for students completing their second, third, and fourth years at the University, only 0.3% (ten students per cohort) for students finishing their fourth

year. These calculated differences do not take into account incentive effects or other dynamic effects noted above that could result in fewer students falling below a 2.0 GPA.

There are small differences among students across race/ethnicity categories in the proportion of students whose GPA falls below 2.0 under plus/minus grading. For the period 2006-2009, the proportion of additional students falling below a cumulative GPA of 2.0 for the largest student groups is as follows: Asian, U.S., 0.5%; Black/African American, U.S., 1.0%; Hispanic, U.S., 0.5%; and White, U.S., 0.3%. A 1.0% proportion increase of Black/African American students with a GPA below 2.0 under plus/minus grading is an average of approximately four additional students each year. Sample sizes are insufficient to support meaningful analysis of changes by year of study and cohort year within each student group. These comparisons do not include the most recent entry cohort (Fall 2010) when a new system for coding race/ethnicity was introduced at the University.

- D. **Transfer Students.** Plus/minus grading has a similar estimated effect on transfer students. Cumulative GPA effects were examined for fall transfer enrollees for the period Fall 2006-Fall 2010. The average change in GPA across all students in these cohorts at the end of their first year of study is -0.03 and remains at this same level for the cohorts of students who have finished two years, three years, and four years. (See Table 6.)

Plus/minus grading results in approximately 20 additional transfer students having a GPA below 2.0 after their first year, 1.1% of all transfer students. The additional number of transfer students under plus/minus grading with a cumulative GPA below 2.0 would be slightly lower for transfer students who have advanced farther toward their degrees.

**V. Comparison of Senate-Approved Policy and APAS 2011 Proposal.** Senate-approved policy awarded 4.3 grade points to A+ grades, in comparison to the APAS proposal. Awarding 4.3 grade points to A+ grades increases cumulative GPA only very slightly, by one or two one-hundredths of a point (0.01 or 0.02), with the effect highest for students completing their fourth year. The resultant effect of plus/minus grading on cumulative GPA under the Senate approved policy falls to 0.01 or 0.02 depending on years of study. (See Table 7.)

**VI. Effect on Currently Enrolled Students in the Transition.** There are two important dimensions in assessing the effect of introducing plus/minus grading policy on currently enrolled students: (1) how cumulative GPA will be calculated, and (2) estimating the magnitude of the change in cumulative GPA.

A student's cumulative GPA will include grade points awarded under the prior and the new policy. The grades and grade points already received by current students under the previous official grade policy will remain unchanged. Current students will receive grade points under the new policy when it becomes effective. The University transcript will include an explanation of this system. A survey of registrars at other institutions showed that this methodology has been used by numerous universities that have introduced plus/minus grades over an extended period of time, and no alternative approach was identified. The most recent major research institutions

that changed grading policy using this methodology are the University of Georgia (2006), Purdue University (2008), and the University of Texas (2009).

The effect of the policy change on cumulative GPAs for current students will depend on how long a student has been at the University. For recently admitted students, cumulative GPA over time will largely reflect grades received under the new policy (a policy they may not have contemplated when they enrolled). For more advanced students, fewer grades will be awarded under the new policy, and effects on cumulative GPA will be smaller. For the average of all undergraduate students currently enrolled, the number of credits receiving plus/minus grades would be approximately one half of the total credits earned at graduation, which implies that the cumulative GPA effect for currently enrolled students would be approximately half the effect presented above for students who are under the new system for four years.

### **Implementation Process and Timetables**

**A. Review of Existing Requirements Not Met by a Minus Grade.** The implementation plan presented here accepts minus grades in all university-wide policies that now define the requirement as a D, C, B, or A grade. A grade of D- is accepted as the lowest passing grade. Many academic departments and programs require minimum course grades that do not specify a plus or minus. This occurs most often at the course level where minimum course grades are part of a course prerequisite requirement, an entry requirement to a major or program, or a degree requirement. If an academic unit does not wish to accept plus or minus grades in satisfaction of any of these requirements, the unit must submit a formal request for an exception to this university-wide implementation plan.

**B. Graduate Courses and Graduate Education.** Previous policies approved by the Senate have included graduate courses and programs. The Graduate Council should analyze the impact of the recommended proposal for plus/minus grading on graduate students, courses, and programs, and the Dean of the Graduate School should report findings and recommendations to the Senate. Introducing plus/minus grading by course level at different points in time will significantly increase the administrative costs of making the changes.

#### **C. Timetable.**

Provost-Senate Task Force: Complete its review and make recommendations to the Senate. (September 1-September 30)

University Senate action on policy. (September 15-December 15)

Academic programs: Review and submit proposals for letter grade requirements for specific courses, entry requirements, or courses for graduation for Senate PCC review. (January 1-February 28)

PCC review or other review as necessary. (February 15-March 31)



Communicate policy changes to faculty, students, and staff, and modify the forthcoming 2012-2013 Undergraduate Catalog as needed. (March 31 – May 31)

Develop administrative procedures to record grades and compile transcripts, Office of Registrar and OIT. (January 1-May 1)

Schedule Contingencies: It will likely take the Spring 2012 term to review and complete adjustments at the course and program level; communicate to the campus; and develop administrative procedures to produce grades and transcripts. If Senate action is not completed during the Fall term, the risk increases that implementation would have to be deferred until Fall 2013.

## Provost's Recommendations for Implementation of Plus/Minus Grading

1. The new scale will include the following grades and grade points:

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Grade points</b>
A+	4.0
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
D-	0.7
F	0

2. All references in future official University publications requiring minimum grades of (1) D be changed to D minus, (2) C be changed to C minus, (3) B be changed to B minus, and (4) A be changed to A minus. With the adoption of the new grading scale, D minus will be considered the lowest passing grade.
3. Exceptions to this change for individual course requirements, degree requirements, and academic policies must be made by the appropriate academic units through the normal processes. For example, a grade of C might be required, rather than a "C minus" grade in the new plus/minus system, to meet a course prerequisite requirement, one or more course requirements for entry to a major, or to meet degree requirements. This principle applies to required course grades at all levels (C minus, B minus, or A minus).
4. The adoption of this new grading scale will not change requirements that are based on any calculated GPA; examples of GPA requirements include scholastic probation, academic dismissal, graduation, continuation in certain programs, and access to specific courses (based on performance in more than one previous course).
5. The new grading scale will be implemented on a "day forward" basis, being effective on the start of a fall semester (to be specified). This scheduled start date will be adhered to unless the Office of the Registrar states that it cannot ensure that all of the necessary processes are in place to ensure an orderly transition; in that case, it will be begin at the start of the first academic year after such assurance can be made. The new grading system will not be effective until it is described in the Undergraduate Catalog.
6. The new scale will not be valid for grade changes made to a student's record for courses taken before the grading scale became effective.

7. Implementation of plus/minus grading will include all undergraduate courses. It will also include graduate courses upon the recommendation of the Graduate Council.
8. The present marking system defining the standards for letter grades will be retained under the new policy: (A+, A, A- denotes excellent mastery of the subject and outstanding scholarship; B+, B, B- denotes good mastery of the subject and good scholarship; C+, C, C- denotes acceptable mastery of the subject; D+, D, D- denotes borderline understanding of the subject (It denotes marginal performance, and it does not represent satisfactory progress toward a degree.); and F denotes failure to understand the subject and unsatisfactory performance.
9. In accordance with this proposal, the Office of the Registrar will revise the Undergraduate Catalog, the course inventory, the official transcript, and University-level degree audit rules. The Graduate Catalog will be revised as appropriate.

**Table 1: Grading Systems at Leading Universities**

Public (Ranked 1-25)	University	Highest A Grade		Lowest C Grade	
		Grade	Grade Points	Grade	Grade Points
Peer	University of Illinois	A+	4	C-	1.67
Peer	UNC	A+	4	C-	1.7
Peer	Berkeley	A+	4	C-	1.7
Peer	UCLA	A+	4	C-	1.7
Peer	University of Michigan	A+	4	C-	1.7
	UC San Diego	A+	4	C-	1.7
	Purdue University	A+	4	C-	1.7
	UVA	A+	4	C-	1.7
	University of Pittsburgh	A+	4	C-	1.75
	UC Davis	A+	4	C-	1.7
	UC Santa Barbara	A+	4	C-	1.7
	UC Irvine	A+	4	C-	1.7
	Penn State	A	4	C	2
	Minnesota	A	4	C-	1.67
	University of Washington	A	4	C-	1.85-1.5
	University of Georgia	A	4	C-	1.7
	University of Wisconsin (no +/-)	A	4	C	2
	William and Mary	A	4	C-	1.7
	Georgia Tech	A	4	C	2
	University of Texas-Austin	A	4	C-	1.67
	University of Florida	A	4	C-	1.67
	Ohio State	A	4	C-	1.7
	Texas A&M	A	4	C	2
	Clemson University	A	4	C	2
	Rutgers	A	4	C	2
	University of Connecticut	A	4	C-	1.7
	Virginia Tech	A	4	C-	1.7
<b>Private (Ranked 1-15)</b>					
	Cornell	A+	4.3	C-	1.7
	Columbia	A+	4.3	C-	1.67
	Stanford	A+	4.3	C-	1.7
	University of Pennsylvania	A+	4	C-	1.7
	Duke	A+	4	C-	1.7
	Johns Hopkins	A+	4	C-	1.7
	Washington U at St. Louis	A+	4	C-	1.7
	Princeton	A+	4	C-	1.7
	MIT	A	5	C	3
	University of Chicago	A	4	C-	1.7
	Northwestern	A	4	C-	1.7
	Yale	A	4	C-	1.67
	California Institute of Technology	A+	4.33	C-	1.67
	Dartmouth	A	4	C-	1.67
	Brown (no +/-)	A		C	

\*\*\*Many Ivy League institutions, including Princeton, Columbia, Brown, and Stanford, do not compute a GPA or maintain a system of class ranking. The above values are the universities' suggestions for converting their grades to grade points, as found on their individual websites. MIT uses plus/minus for internal purposes only and they do not factor into calculating GPA. Brown does not calculate GPA. University of Wisconsin uses A, AB, B, BC, C, and D rather than pluses and minuses.

**Table 2: Full Distribution of Grades Awarded in Fall and Spring Term to Undergraduate Students between Fall 2006 and Fall 2010**

<b>Course Grades</b>	<b>N of Grades</b>	<b>% of Total Grades</b>
<b>A+</b>	64,114	6%
<b>A</b>	272,343	25%
<b>A-</b>	148,799	14%
<b>B+</b>	95,409	9%
<b>B</b>	202,504	19%
<b>B-</b>	75,088	7%
<b>C+</b>	38,398	4%
<b>C</b>	95,282	9%
<b>C-</b>	27,309	3%
<b>D+</b>	5,813	1%
<b>D</b>	25,715	2%
<b>D-</b>	4,027	0%
<b>F</b>	29,557	3%
<b>XF</b>	255	0%
<b>Total</b>	1,084,613	100%

**Table 3A: Effect on Cumulative GPA for Entering First-Year Students, by Years Completed at the University**

<b>Years Completed</b>	<b>Fall Cohorts</b>	<b>Cohort N</b>	<b>N Students with Courses</b>	<b>Avg Effect</b>
<b>Year 1</b>	<b>Fall 2006-2010</b>	20,185	19,761	-0.03
<b>Year 2</b>	<b>Fall 2006-2009</b>	16,262	14,694	-0.03
<b>Year 3</b>	<b>Fall 2006-2008</b>	12,069	9,683	-0.03
<b>Year 4</b>	<b>Fall 2006-2007</b>	8,169	6,438	-0.03

**Please Note (for this table and subsequent tables):** Only first-time, full-time students were included in the initial fall cohorts. At the end of each year completed, students were included only if they had received a letter grade (e.g. A+ through F) in the given term (e.g. first, second, third, or fourth spring term). The "Avg Effect" displays the average net change in cumulative GPAs at the university level, where students with increasing and decreasing cumulative GPAs may cancel each other out in the overall average. The letter grade values as specified in the recent University Senate Proposal (Document Number 10-11-11) were used in calculating the proposed cumulative GPAs, where an A+ letter grade receives a 4.0.

**Table 3B: Effect on Cumulative GPA for Entering First-Year Students, by Years Completed at the University**

Years Completed	Race/Ethnicity	Cohort N	N Students with Courses	Avg Effect
<b>Year 1 (Fall Cohorts 2006-2009)</b>	<b>American Indian:U.S.</b>	48	46	-0.02
	<b>Asian:U.S.</b>	2,375	2,349	-0.03
	<b>Black/African-American:U.S.</b>	2,098	2,056	-0.03
	<b>Foreign</b>	261	248	-0.04
	<b>Hispanic:U.S.</b>	1,077	1,044	-0.03
	<b>Unknown:U.S.</b>	765	745	-0.03
	<b>White:U.S.</b>	9,638	9,423	-0.03
<b>Year 2 (Fall Cohorts 2006-2009)</b>	<b>American Indian:U.S.</b>	48	42	-0.02
	<b>Asian:U.S.</b>	2,375	2,223	-0.03
	<b>Black/African-American:U.S.</b>	2,098	1,867	-0.03
	<b>Foreign</b>	261	220	-0.04
	<b>Hispanic:U.S.</b>	1,077	940	-0.03
	<b>Unknown:U.S.</b>	765	690	-0.03
	<b>White:U.S.</b>	9,638	8,712	-0.03
<b>Year 3 (Fall Cohorts 2006-2008)</b>	<b>American Indian:U.S.</b>	41	26	-0.03
	<b>Asian:U.S.</b>	1,708	1,474	-0.03
	<b>Black/African-American:U.S.</b>	1,713	1,402	-0.03
	<b>Foreign</b>	172	132	-0.04
	<b>Hispanic:U.S.</b>	819	629	-0.03
	<b>Unknown:U.S.</b>	595	489	-0.03
	<b>White:U.S.</b>	7,021	5,531	-0.03
<b>Year 4 (Fall Cohorts 2006-2007)</b>	<b>American Indian:U.S.</b>	27	20	-0.03
	<b>Asian:U.S.</b>	1,134	922	-0.03
	<b>Black/African-American:U.S.</b>	1,176	893	-0.03
	<b>Foreign</b>	106	67	-0.04
	<b>Hispanic:U.S.</b>	569	431	-0.03
	<b>Unknown:U.S.</b>	408	317	-0.03
	<b>White:U.S.</b>	4,749	3,788	-0.03

**Table 4: Effect of Cumulative GPA for Entering First-Year Students, by Level of Current Cumulative GPA**

Current Cumulative GPA Bands	Years Completed							
	Year 1 (Fall Cohorts 2006-2010)		Year 2 (Fall Cohorts 2006-2009)		Year 3 (Fall Cohorts 2006-2008)		Year 4 (Fall Cohorts 2006-2007)	
	N of Students	Avg Effect	N of Students	Avg Effect	N of Students	Avg Effect	N of Students	Avg Effect
<b>0.00-1.99</b>	1,236	-0.02	532	-0.02	233	-0.03	114	-0.03
<b>2.00-2.30</b>	1,091	-0.02	701	-0.02	466	-0.03	271	-0.03
<b>2.31-2.70</b>	2,256	-0.02	1,712	-0.03	1,133	-0.03	649	-0.03
<b>2.71-3.00</b>	2,682	-0.02	2,099	-0.02	1,400	-0.02	909	-0.03
<b>3.01-3.30</b>	3,333	-0.02	2,596	-0.03	1,792	-0.03	1,242	-0.03
<b>3.31-3.70</b>	5,150	-0.03	4,065	-0.04	2,686	-0.04	1,905	-0.04
<b>3.71-4.00</b>	4,013	-0.05	2,989	-0.04	1,973	-0.04	1,348	-0.04
<b>Total</b>	19,761	-0.03	14,694	-0.03	9,683	-0.03	6,438	-0.03



**Table 5: Changes in the Number of First-Year Students with a Cumulative GPA Below 2.0, by Years Completed at the University**

Years Completed	Fall Entry Cohort	Cohort N	N Students with Courses	Add'l Students LT 2.0 w/ New GPA	
				N	% of Students with Courses
<b>Year 1</b>	<b>Fall 2006</b>	3,945	3,839	24	0.6%
	<b>Fall 2007</b>	4,224	4,132	23	0.6%
	<b>Fall 2008</b>	3,900	3,812	18	0.5%
	<b>Fall 2009</b>	4,193	4,128	17	0.4%
	<b>Fall 2010</b>	3,923	3,850	22	0.6%
	<b>Total</b>	20,185	19,761	104	0.5%
<b>Year 2</b>	<b>Fall 2006</b>	3,945	3,499	16	0.5%
	<b>Fall 2007</b>	4,224	3,795	12	0.3%
	<b>Fall 2008</b>	3,900	3,522	12	0.3%
	<b>Fall 2009</b>	4,193	3,878	12	0.3%
	<b>Total</b>	16,262	14,694	52	0.4%
<b>Year 3</b>	<b>Fall 2006</b>	3,945	3,090	20	0.6%
	<b>Fall 2007</b>	4,224	3,391	15	0.4%
	<b>Fall 2008</b>	3,900	3,202	11	0.3%
	<b>Total</b>	12,069	9,683	46	0.5%
<b>Year 4</b>	<b>Fall 2006</b>	3,945	3,108	10	0.3%
	<b>Fall 2007</b>	4,224	3,330	10	0.3%
	<b>Total</b>	8,169	6,438	20	0.3%

**Please Note:** Only first-time, full-time students were included in the initial fall cohorts. At the end of each year completed, students were included only if they had received a letter grade (e.g. A+ through F) in the given term (e.g. first, second, third, or fourth spring term). In the "Add'l Students less than 2.0 with New GPA" category, the net effect of the proposed GPA calculation was displayed, which means there were more students with less than a 2.0 cumulative GPA under the proposed calculation method than in the current method. The letter grade values as specified in the recent University Senate Proposal (Document Number 10-11-11) were used in calculating the Proposed cumulative GPAs, where an A+ letter grade receives a 4.0.

**Table 6: Changes in the Number of Transfer Students with a Cumulative GPA Below 2.0 and Average Effect to Cumulative GPA, by Years Completed at the University**

Years Completed	Fall Entry Cohort	Cohort N	N Students with Courses	Add'l Students LT 2.0 w/ New GPA		Avg Effect
				N	% of Students with Courses	
<b>Year 1</b>	<b>Fall 2006</b>	1,826	1,664	23	1.4%	-0.03
	<b>Fall 2007</b>	1,928	1,737	23	1.3%	-0.03
	<b>Fall 2008</b>	2,038	1,869	22	1.2%	-0.03
	<b>Fall 2009</b>	1,906	1,772	22	1.2%	-0.03
	<b>Fall 2010</b>	1,750	1,622	12	0.7%	-0.03
	<b>Total</b>	9,448	8,664	102	1.2%	-0.03
<b>Year 2</b>	<b>Fall 2006</b>	1,826	1,412	17	1.2%	-0.03
	<b>Fall 2007</b>	1,928	1,463	18	1.2%	-0.03
	<b>Fall 2008</b>	2,038	1,616	16	1.0%	-0.03
	<b>Fall 2009</b>	1,906	1,526	14	0.9%	-0.03
	<b>Total</b>	7,698	6,017	65	1.1%	-0.03
<b>Year 3</b>	<b>Fall 2006</b>	1,826	739	6	0.8%	-0.03
	<b>Fall 2007</b>	1,928	810	4	0.5%	-0.03
	<b>Fall 2008</b>	2,038	876	8	0.9%	-0.03
	<b>Total</b>	5,792	2,425	18	0.7%	-0.03
<b>Year 4</b>	<b>Fall 2006</b>	1,826	165	0	0.0%	-0.03
	<b>Fall 2007</b>	1,928	205	3	1.5%	-0.03
	<b>Total</b>	3,754	370	3	0.8%	-0.03

**Please Note:** Only full-time new transfer students were included in the initial fall cohorts for their first entry as a transfer student. At the end of each year completed, students were included only if they had received a letter grade (e.g. A+ through F) in the given term (e.g. first, second, third, or fourth spring term). In the "Add'l Students less than 2.0 with New GPA" category, the net effect of the proposed GPA calculation was displayed, which means there were more students with less than a 2.0 cumulative GPA under the proposed calculation method than in the current method. The letter grade values as specified in the recent University Senate Proposal (Document Number 10-11-11) were used in calculating the Proposed cumulative GPAs, where an A+ letter grade receives a 4.0.

**Table 7: Effect on Cumulative GPA for Entering First-Year Students Using Different Methods of Accounting for "A+" Letter Grades, by Years Completed at the University**

Years Completed	Fall Cohorts	Cohort N	N Students with Courses	Avg Effect	
				Proposed (A+= 4.0)	Approved (A+=4.3)
Year 1	Fall 2006-2010	20,185	19,761	-0.03	-0.01
Year 2	Fall 2006-2009	16,262	14,694	-0.03	-0.01
Year 3	Fall 2006-2008	12,069	9,683	-0.03	-0.01
Year 4	Fall 2006-2007	8,169	6,438	-0.03	-0.02

**Please Note:** Only first-time, full-time students were included in the initial fall cohorts. At the end of each year completed, students were included only if they had received a letter grade (e.g. A+ through F) in the given term (e.g. first, second, third, or fourth spring term). The "Avg Effect" displays the average net change in cumulative GPAs at the university level, where students with increasing and decreasing cumulative GPAs may cancel each other out in the average. The letter grade values as specified in the recent University Senate Proposal (Document Number 10-11-11) were used in calculating the proposed cumulative GPAs, where an A+ letter grade receives a 4.0. Cumulative GPAs were recalculated under Senate approved grading, where an A+ letter grade receives a 4.3 (Document Number 99-00-56).

**Appendix C – Statement from the Graduate School on Plus/Minus Grading**



UNIVERSITY OF  
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THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
*Office of the Dean*

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**MEMORANDUM**

October 17, 2011

To: Ann Wylie  
Provost and Senior Vice-President

Eric Kasischke  
Chair, University Senate

From: Charles Caramello  
Associate Provost and Dean

Re: Implementation of Graduate Plus/Minus Grading

At the request of the Senate Executive Committee, the Office of the Provost forwarded an “Implementation Plan for Plus/Minus Grading” to the Chair of the Senate on September 1, 2011. This plan was copied to the Council of Deans, who discussed it at the Council of Deans meeting of September 19, 2011. Focused largely on undergraduate education, the Provost’s Plan also makes four explicit references to graduate education.

The Provost’s Implementation Plan explains that previous policies on plus/minus grading approved by the Senate have included undergraduate and graduate grades. It encourages the Graduate Council to analyze the impact of plus/minus grading on graduate students, and, via the Dean of the Graduate School, to forward recommendations to the Senate.

The Graduate Council endorsed the following recommendations regarding Implementation of Plus/Minus Grading at its meeting of September 28, 2011. I am pleased to forward these recommendations, together with supporting data, to the Provost and the Senate.

**Recommendations**

1. The minimum grade stipulated by the Graduate School for graduate degree credit for individual courses, currently established as C, should remain as C (or 2.0). The grade of C- (or 1.7) will not count for graduate degree credit.

2. The minimum grade for individual course requirements currently specified in *Graduate School Policies* as B should continue to be specified as B (or 3.0). The grade of B- (or 2.7) will not suffice as minimum grade in these instances, which include, but are not limited to, courses being used for transfer credit and courses at the 600 level or above being double-counted for the Individual Student Bachelor's/Master's Program.
3. Any minimum requirements for overall GPA established in *Graduate School Policies* as 3.0 should remain as 3.0.
4. The minimum requirement stipulated by the Graduate School for *Good Standing* will not change: "In order to maintain good academic standing, every graduate student must maintain a cumulative grade point average (GPA) of 3.0 for all courses taken at the University."
5. Individual programs, using approved processes, can continue to establish requirements that exceed or augment those set by the Graduate School.
6. Policies for *Academic Probation and Dismissal* will be revised as follows:  
a student whose cumulative grade point average falls below 3.0 will not be placed on probation until s/he completes 12 credits or two semesters, whichever comes first.
7. Transition policies proposed in the Provost's Implementation Plan should apply to graduate students as well as to undergraduates.

## PLUS/MINUS GRADING AND GRADUATE EDUCATION

### I. GRADUATE STUDENT GRADING AT PEER INSTITUTIONS

Graduate student grading systems at our designated peer institutions and other similar public research universities are comparable to the proposed UM plan. Three of our five peers use the same grading system as the Provost's proposed plan, and many universities use some version of plus/minus grading. Only a few institutions award higher grade points for A+ than for A grades. Universities using plus/minus grading commonly use it for both undergraduate and graduate students.

Institution	Grading Policy	Policies Regarding Good Academic Standing
UCLA	Same as proposed UM policy	Must maintain a 3.0 to remain in good academic standing
UC Berkeley	Same as proposed UM policy	Must maintain a 3.0 to remain in good academic standing
UIUC	Same as proposed UM policy	Must maintain a 2.75 to remain in good academic standing
UNC	Assigns High pass, Pass, Low pass, and Fail	Not applicable - Grad School does not have a 4.0 scale
Michigan	Majority of programs are on a 9.0 GPA scale, with A+ awarded 9 points, A = 8 points, A- = 7 points, B+ = 6, etc.	Have a cumulate average of 5.0 (B) or better
U Delaware	Does not award A+, but otherwise grading system is similar to proposed UM system	Must maintain a 3.0 to remain in good academic standing
U Minnesota	Does not award A+, but otherwise grading system is similar to proposed UM system	Individual departments/colleges set the floor
Ohio State	Does not award A+, but otherwise grading system is similar to proposed UM system	Must maintain a 3.0 to remain in good academic standing
Virginia Tech	Does not award A+, but otherwise grading system is similar to proposed UM system	Must maintain a 3.0 to remain in good academic standing
Penn State	No A+ or C-, otherwise grading system is similar to proposed UM system	Must maintain a 3.0 to remain in good academic standing
U Iowa	A+ is awarded as 4.33, otherwise same as proposed UM policy	Must maintain a 3.0 to remain in good academic standing (PhD students only)
UVA	Same as proposed UM policy	Individual departments/colleges set the floor
Rutgers	Graduate programs use different grading systems (some programs award plus grades, others do not award minus grades)	Individual departments/colleges set the floor

## II. EFFECTS OF PLUS/MINUS GRADING ON GRADUATE STUDENTS

### A. Summary

Implementation of plus/minus grading will produce a minimal reduction in average cumulative GPA, negative three to four one-hundredths of a GPA point (-0.03 to -0.04), based on analysis of all masters and doctoral students admitted in the period of Falls 2006- 2010 over their first three years of study. This projected change occurs because slightly more minus grades than plus grades were awarded to graduate students.

Graduate School policy requires students to have a 3.0 GPA to remain in good academic standing. Implementation of plus/minus grading with B- equaling 2.7 will produce a slight increase in the number of students falling below 3.0. To offset this effect, the Graduate Council has approved a change in the graduate policies for Academic Probation and Dismissal.

### B. Analysis

#### 1. Senate Proposals for Plus/Minus Grades in GPA Calculation

The University Senate has twice approved plus/minus grading and its use in GPA calculations. A University task force conducted an extensive study of plus/minus grading in 1999-2000, including campus-wide discussion and surveys of undergraduate and graduate students and faculty. The Senate passed the proposal on April 6, 2000, and President Mote approved it on August 28, 2000. Implementation was deferred. The Senate again approved plus/minus grading on December 25, 2005, with Presidential approval on April 26, 2006. Implementation again was deferred.

The recommendation of the Senate Academic Procedures and Standards Committee (APAS) for plus/minus grading differs from the policies previously approved by the Senate only by assigning 4.0 grade points for an A+ rather than 4.3 grade points. The APAS proposal includes the following grade point values:

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Grade points</b>
A+	4.0
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
D-	0.7
F	0

## 2. Effects on Graduate Student GPA

The simplest illustration of effects on GPA compares cumulative GPA for students throughout their period of study a) under the University's existing policy without plus/minus grade points and b) under the Provost's proposed plan of plus/minus grading with both A and A+ grades assigned a value of 4.0. Grades awarded for the period Falls 2006-2010 are used for analysis.

**a. Grade Distribution.** Differences in outcomes associated with a plus/minus grading system depend on the distribution of plus/minus grades awarded by faculty at the University. For the period Falls 2006-2010, faculty awarded more minus grades than plus grades to graduate students.

Grade distribution was as follows. 69.2% of grades awarded to graduate students in graduate courses (600-level and above) were either A+, A, B, C, or D. Of the remaining 30.8% of grades awarded, 20.3% carried minuses (A-, B-, C-, or D-), and 10.2% carried pluses (B+, C+, or D+). The 10.1% differential suggests that the overall effect of the proposed grading system (without accounting for numbers of credit hours) would be a small decline in cumulative graduate GPAs at the University, as detailed below. (The remaining 0.3% of grades were F or XF.)

**b. Cumulative GPA.** Projected effects on cumulative GPA can be shown through analysis of cumulative GPA for incoming doctoral and masters students in the five entry cohorts of Falls 2006-2010. Had plus/minus grading been in place, it would have had the following effects on cumulative GPA for graduate students at the end of each of their first three years at the University.

At the end of the first year of study, average changes in GPA for these five cohorts are -0.04 GPA points for new doctoral students and -0.03 GPA points for new masters students. At the end of the second year (based on the four cohorts who have completed two years), average changes in GPA remain at the same levels. At the end of the third year (based on the three cohorts who have completed three years), average changes drop to -0.03 GPA points for doctoral students and remain constant for masters students.

Projected effects of the proposed plus/minus grading plan on GPA are similar overall across race/ethnicity, with changes in GPA ranging on average from -0.01 GPA points to -0.05 GPA points for new students at the end of the first year of study.

**c. Cumulative GPA below 3.0.** The Graduate School requires students to have a 3.0 GPA to remain in good academic standing. Under a plus/minus grading system in which B- equals 2.7, the number of new students whose cumulative GPA fall below 3.0 following the first year of study would increase slightly: an average of 10 *additional* doctoral students (1.4%) and 33 *additional* masters students (2.0%) per cohort for the five entry cohorts of Falls 2006-2010. For the five cohorts *combined*, a total of 52 additional doctoral students and 163 additional masters students would drop below a 3.0 GPA.

Data for Falls 2006-2010 cannot be used to gauge effects across race/ethnicity accurately because a new system for coding race/ethnicity was introduced nationally in Fall 2010. For the Falls 2006- 2009 cohorts (as opposed to the Falls 2006-2010 cohorts), the numbers are as



follows: an average of 11 *additional* doctoral students and 30 *additional* masters students per cohort fall below 3.0 GPA; for the four cohorts *combined*, a total of 44 additional doctoral students and 121 additional masters students. Of the 11 doctoral students, on average 4 are U.S. white, 4 International, and 3 U.S. African American or U.S. Hispanic; of the 30 masters students, on average 11 are U.S. white, 11 African American or U.S. Hispanic, 5 International, and 3 other.

A very small number of students in the overall population also would drop below a 3.0 GPA following completion of their second year of study: an average of 3 additional doctoral students and 9 additional masters students per cohort. For four of the cohorts *combined* (the Fall 2010 cohort has not completed its second year), a total of 10 additional doctoral students and 35 additional masters students drop below a 3.0 GPA. The numbers are even smaller for students following their third year.

To offset these effects of plus/minus grading, the Graduate Council has discussed and endorsed the following change in the graduate policies for Academic Probation and Dismissal: a student whose cumulative grade point average falls below 3.0 will *not* be placed on probation until s/he completes 12 credits or two semesters, whichever comes first. The Graduate School, in addition, will continue its long standing practice of routinely following academic department recommendations regarding probation or dismissal, extending probation and deferring or reversing dismissal at departmental request.

**d. Currently Enrolled Students.** There are two issues: calculating cumulative GPA, and estimating the magnitude of change in cumulative GPA.

For consistency with implementation at the undergraduate level, a current graduate student's cumulative GPA will include grade points awarded under both the prior and the new system. The current student's grades and grade points awarded under the previous policy, without plus/minus values calculated in GPA, will remain unchanged. Current students will receive grade points under the new policy when it becomes effective, and the University transcript will include an explanation. A survey of registrars at other institutions indicated that numerous universities have used this method, including University of Georgia (2006), Purdue University (2008), and the University of Texas (2009).

The change in grading policy will vary in effect on cumulative GPA for current students depending on how long a student has been at the University. The cumulative GPA of recently admitted students largely will reflect grades awarded under the new policy. The cumulative GPA of more advanced students will include fewer grades awarded under the new policy and will be affected less.

***October 17, 2011***

**Appendix D – Memo from the SEC on D Grade Comparison**




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Date: October 3, 2011

To: Robert Buchanan, Chair, Academic Procedures & Standards (APAS) Committee

From: Eric Kasischke, Chair of the University Senate 

Subject: D Grade Table - Proposal to Review the University of Maryland Policies Concerning Academic Transcripts and Calculation of Grade Point Average (Senate Doc. No. 10-11-11)

The SEC recently received a table of D Grade Assessment Systems at Leading Universities from the Provost's Office. It was reviewed at the SEC meeting on September 26, 2011, and members agreed to forward the table to the APAS Committee. The SEC would like the committee to consider the attached table as an informational item during your deliberation of the Policies Concerning Academic Transcripts and Calculation of Grade Point Average. If you have questions or need assistance, please contact Reka Montfort in the Senate Office, extension 5-5804.

Attachment

EK/rm

## Grading Systems at Leading Universities

University	D+ Grade	D Grade	D- Grade
<b>Public (Ranked 1-25)</b>			
University of Illinois	1.33	1.0	.67
UNC	1.3	1.0	--
Berkeley	--	1.0	--
UCLA	1.3	1.0	.7
University of Michigan	1.3	1.0	.7
UC San Diego	--	1.0	--
Purdue University	1.3	1.0	.7
UVA	1.3	1.0	.7
University of Pittsburgh	1.25	1.0	.75
UC Davis	1.3	1.0	.7
UC Santa Barbara	1.3	1.0	.7
UC Irvine	1.3	1.0	.7
Penn State	--	1.0	--
Minnesota	1.33	1.0	--
University of Washington	1.4-1.2	1.1-1.09	.8-.7
University of Georgia	--	1.0	--
University of Wisconsin (no +/-)	--	1.0	--
William and Mary	1.3	1.0	.7
Georgia Tech	--	1.0	--
University of Austin-Texas	1.33	1.0	.67
University of Florida	1.33	1.0	.67
Ohio State	--	1.0	--
Texas A&M	--	1.0	--
Clemson University	--	1.0	--
Rutgers	--	1.0	--
University of Connecticut	1.3	1.0	.7
Virginia Tech	1.3	1.0	.7
<b>Private (ranked 1-15)</b>			
Cornell	1.3	1.0	.7
Columbia	1.33	1.0	.67
Stanford	1.3	1.0	.7
University of Pennsylvania	1.3	1.0	--
Duke	1.3	1.0	1.0
John Hopkins	1.3	1.0	.7
Washington U at St. Louis	1.3	1.0	.7
Princeton	--	1.0	--
MIT	--	1.0	--
University of Chicago	1.3	1.0	1.0
Northwestern	--	1.0	--
Yale	1.3	1.0	.7
California Institute of Technology	--	1.0	--
Dartmouth	--	1.0	--
Brown (no +/-)			