

Queen's University
Senate Committee on Academic Procedures

RESPONSE TO THE GPA REVIEW COMMITTEE: FINAL REPORT

March 2013

Background

In May 2009, Queen's Senate approved an official grading system composed of letter grades, with pluses and minuses, grade points, and grade descriptors. In April 2010, Senate approved the specific grading scale, with a 4.3 grade point being deemed equivalent to an A+ letter grade. On May 1, 2011, Queen's University's new grading scheme became effective.

At its November 2011 meeting, Queen's University Senate requested that the Senate Committee on Academic Procedures (SCAP) require all Faculties and Schools to report to SCAP about the provisions that had been implemented concerning grading practices and to confirm that necessary corrective action had been taken to eliminate any disadvantage for students. Fulfilling this request, SCAP's Report on Grading Practices was submitted to Senate in February 2012.

In April 2012, the Provost requested that Queen's Chief Information Officer (CIO) convene a small group to conduct a review of the implementation of the GPA system. The GPA Review Committee's final report was submitted to the Provost in Fall 2012. The Report was referred to SCAP in November 2012 for its feedback prior to proceeding toward the implementation of the Report's recommendations.

Analysis and Discussion

The Senate Committee on Academic Procedures discussed the GPA Review Committee's Report at its November 2012 meeting and at meetings held in January, February, and March, 2013.

Members of SCAP took into consideration all of the work completed by SCAP since 2009, as well as the various reports completed since the implementation of the new grading system. SCAP conducted its discussions with representation from faculty, undergraduate and graduate students, and staff members.

Recommendations

Below are listed the specific recommendations made by the GPA Review Committee in its report. Feedback from SCAP is included in italics after each recommendation is listed.

1. Given that departments have already adapted to the GPA and that Faculties, such as Arts and Science, have already put into place extensive policies and best practices on the use of the GPA, we do not envisage any changes in how grades are submitted.
 - a) If the input grade is submitted as a percentage, we recommend ensuring that this information is preserved and that all departments are made aware of how to access this information.

Not all members of SCAP were convinced that all faculty members have adapted to the GPA, since some continue to evaluate students using percentages and submit those percentage grades into the PS system. It was confirmed that, if a percentage grade is used as the "input grade" when entering data into PeopleSoft Student, that percentage grade is retained in the system. Access to that information is available in PS Student

*and only a limited number of individuals within the PeopleSoft Sustainment unit have the appropriate level of security to access the information. During discussions, it became clear that many students and faculty members are unaware that **a grade distribution report, showing how many students earned a particular grade in a particular class, is available** for online viewing as well as hard copy printing, to all students via the SOLUS Student Center. Although there is information on the Office of the University Registrar's (OUR) website showing users how to create a grade distribution report, it was agreed that the OUR should work toward ensuring this information is more broadly communicated.*

- b) Percentage input grades will not be passed forward to the student transcript.
SCAP members were divided on the issue of whether percentage input grades should be displayed on the official transcript.

Those supporting the recommendation that percentage input grades not be passed forward to the student transcript expressed a desire not to appeal to the high degree of precision that results from grading in percentages. Also noted was the fact that many external reviewers of the transcript do not use percentage grades and that a transcript with percentage grades, letter grades, and grade points could present confusion. This confusion could be heightened by the fact that the only courses showing a percentage grade will be those for which a percentage grade was submitted, and many faculty members now mark only using letter grades. It was acknowledged that the most common transcript practice in Canada and the United States is to display letter grades and/or grade points. Concern was expressed regarding the estimated cost of \$300,000 required to customize the student information system to accommodate the change, which would be required each time the system was subsequently upgraded. Concern was also expressed that, if percentages do appear on the transcript, many students who are currently silent on the issue would voice opposition to the change.

Those against the recommendation that percentage input grades not be passed forward to the student transcript were of the belief that, if a percentage input grade is used to assess a student, the information should be available to the student and others via the official transcript. It was acknowledged that some universities in Canada do present percentages on the transcript along with letter grades and/or grade points, and that some external reviewers appreciate having the additional information contained in percentage grades when reviewing transcripts. It was also acknowledged that the term GPA and cumulative GPA currently in use rely upon the same degree of precision as that relied upon by percentage grades. Widespread student support for the inclusion of percentages on the transcript has been expressed and many faculty members continue to grade using percentages and not letter grades.

*After the discussion concluded, SCAP members held a vote. **Two members disagreed and five members agreed that it is academically preferable (i.e. excluding financial considerations) that percentage input grades be passed forward to the student transcript.***

2. An education program should be put in place to ensure there is a common understanding of how to grade using GPA.

SCAP members recognized that some Faculties, Schools, and/or departments have already put in place, or are currently working toward, a variety of education programs for their

*faculty members. Members recommended that **the decision about whether further education is needed for instructors be left up to individual academic units.***

3. Consideration should be given to adopting a 3.5 for Dean's List, similar to what was done in the Faculty of Arts and Science.

*It was confirmed that **all Faculties and Schools that have a Dean's List or similar award have already made the change to a 3.5 GPA cut off.***

4. It is recommended that we no longer place the cumulative GPA on transcripts.

*At present, the cumulative grade point average (CGPA) is placed on transcripts. It is arrived at by calculating the average of all grade points received by a student during the time they are classified in one specific career (see point 6 below for more information about careers). Confusion has been caused by the fact that a student may switch academic programs while remaining in the same career, but that their CGPA would take into account the grade points received in both their old and more recent academic programs. **SCAP members agree with the recommendation that the CGPA no longer be placed on the transcript.** It has been confirmed that the CGPA information will remain available to students via the SOLUS Student Center, as well as to PS Student users with the appropriate security access.*

5. The Faculty of Education should be asked to consider adjusting to the 4.3 scale.

Currently, the Faculty of Education uses a subset of the approved official grading system with a top grade point of 4.0. This has proven to cause problems when students are enrolled in the various Concurrent Education programs, during which they concurrently complete an Arts, Science, Computing, or Music degree and an Education degree, since the Faculty of Arts and Science uses the full 4.3 scale.

*Representatives from the Faculty of Education were invited to SCAP's February 2013 meeting to provide feedback on this specific recommendation. **There was general agreement that an adjustment to the 4.3 scale would be positive** and that it would be discussed by the committees and groups that had authority to make the change at the Faculty in the upcoming months.*

6. The committee feels that there is not a need to create any new careers.

*A "career" is a term used within the PeopleSoft Student system and is the first level of classification of students in the system, after which students are classified by academic program (for example, Arts and Science, Law, Education) and academic plan (for example, History or Biology). Queen's currently has four careers – undergraduate, graduate, distance, and non-credit. Consideration had been given in the past to adding one or more careers to alleviate the problems described in items 4 and 5. **Members of SCAP agreed that the existing four careers are sufficient and, since items 4 and 5 are moving toward implementation, there is not a need to create new careers in the PS Student system.***

7. We should review the information on the back of the transcript and look to improve the explanation of the GPA.

*SCAP members were of the opinion that **the primary source for detailed information about the grading system be the Office of the University Registrar's website** and that the transcript should direct readers to that website. The information currently on the website concerning the transcript, the transcript legend (both current and past versions), and the grading scheme should be reviewed and updated to ensure it is as clear as possible.*

Summary

The Senate Committee on Academic Procedures approved this Report at its March 7, 2013 meeting and now requests that Senate consider the feedback provided above at its earliest convenience.

Membership

J. Metcalfe, University Registrar

L. Burlock, BSc '14

R. Coupland, Office of the University Registrar (Secretary)

C. Esselmont, PhD candidate, Department of Philosophy

H. Everson, Faculty of Arts and Science

J. Mennell, Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures

J. Morelli, Department of Physics, Engineering Physics, and Astronomy

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