



The Florida State University
Tallahassee, Florida 32306-1042

College of Business

Donna

March 6, 1987

MEMORANDUM

TO: Faculty Senators
FROM: Undergraduate Policy Committee
RE: Materials for March 11 Faculty Senate Meeting

Attached is the Undergraduate Policy Committee report regarding the effects of the change to a plus/minus grading system. The Committee will recommend the addition of an A+ grade to the current system at the March 11 Faculty Senate meeting (see page 3 of the report).

GRADUATE DATA WERE
FORWARDED TO GPC.

EFFECTS OF THE CHANGE TO A PLUS/MINUS
GRADING SYSTEM AT FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

Report of the Undergraduate Policy Committee
to the Faculty Senate - March 11, 1987

Background

The current plus/minus grading system was adopted by the Faculty Senate on April 18, 1984, to be effective in Fall 1984. The proposal to change to this grading system was brought to the Undergraduate Policy Committee (UPC) in the 1983-84 academic year by the Student Senate.

After substantial discussion, the UPC recommended to the Faculty Senate a plus/minus system including the A+ grade at 4.25 quality points. The system proposed by the UPC was amended by the Senate to delete the A+ grade. Amendments to delete the C-, to change the quality point interval to .33, and to increase each quality point assignment (except A) by .25 were defeated.

The system below was adopted

A	4.00	B-	2.75	D+	1.25
A-	3.75	C+	2.25	D	1.00
B+	3.25	C	2.00	D-	0.75
B	3.00	C-	1.75	F	0.00

Following adoption of the system above, the Senate instructed the UPC to monitor the operation of the plus/minus system and to report back to the Senate in the system's third year of use. This report is in response to that request.

Data Examined

To review the effects of the change to the current grading system, the UPC examined data on grade distributions, semester averages, students dismissed for academic reasons, students on academic probation, and students graduating with distinction. The Committee also received survey data from Student Government regarding student and faculty opinions regarding the grading system.

Table 1 shows undergraduate grade distributions from Fall 1982 through Fall 1986. Table 2 shows the percentage of grades within each grade range. The percentage of grades in each grade range appears relatively constant over the entire time period. Recall that the plus/minus system became effective in Fall 1984.

Table 3 shows the percentage of plus grades and minus grades within each grade range for Fall 1984 through Fall 1986 (e.g., in Fall 1984, 16.1% of the grades in the B range were B+ and 15.5% were B-). Note that within each grade range, except A, the plus grades exceed the minus grades. In the A range, only minuses are present as the grading system does not include A+.

Table 4 shows the number of undergraduate students dismissed for academic reasons and on academic probation for the years 1982-83 through 1985-86.

These numbers indicate little effect from the change in grading system. The data in table 4 were examined to get some indication of the effect of the C- grade having less than 2.00 quality points.

Table 5 shows the number and percentage of undergraduate students graduating with distinction during the 1982-86 time period. Again, the data is relatively constant. These data were examined in response to the concern that the very best students are being hurt by the presence of the A- grade with no chance to offset it.

Similar data for graduate students were examined. The data have similar characteristics with the exception of graduate dismissals, which have increased. For information purposes, the graduate data are being forwarded to the Graduate Policy Committee. In addition, semester averages for students in differing classifications (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior, graduate) are relatively constant during the Fall 1982 through Fall 1986 period. Since the graduate and semester averages data have similar characteristics to the data in tables 1 through 5, the detailed data is omitted for this report in the interest of brevity.

The Committee also considered survey results provided by Student Government. Table 6 shows the results of a survey of students conducted in early February 1987. Students were polled in selected classes across course levels and disciplines. Table 6 also contains the results of a March 1986 straw poll conducted during student elections. Table 7 shows the results of a survey of faculty members conducted by Student Government in February 1987. The results of this survey indicate that the majority of faculty give plus and minus grades and are satisfied with the current grading system. However, most students, particularly upper division students, do not like the plus/minus system.

On February 19, 1987, the UPC met with representatives of Student Government, the Arts & Sciences Student Advisory Committee, and the College of Business Student Advisory Committee. Based on this discussion, it appears that student concerns can be summarized as follows:

- (1) The system is unfair because pluses and minuses are not used by all faculty.
- (2) The system penalizes the "A student" because of the presence of the A- which cannot be offset.
- (3) The system is unfair because the C- grade has less than 2.00 quality points. A similar argument can be made regarding the B- grade at the graduate level.

Finally, the UPC received a copy of a Student Senate resolution encouraging the Committee to recommend that the current grading system be changed to a "plus-only" grading system. A copy of the resolution is included as Exhibit 1 of this report.

Alternatives to the Current System

The Committee received many suggestions regarding possible modifications to the current system. Listed below are the alternatives to the current system that the Committee considered:

- (1) return to the prior system with no pluses and minuses.
- (2) adopt a plus/minus system where all grades within a grades range have the same quality points (e.g., B+, B, and B- all equal 3.00 quality points).
- (3) change the grade intervals to 0.33 quality points each.
- (4) add an A+ with 4.25 quality points to the current system.
- (5) delete the A- from the current system.
- (6) adopt a plus-only system.

Conclusion

The current grading system appears to be working as was intended when it was adopted. Grade ranges have remained relatively constant while the grades within each range have been divided into narrower categories; and therefore, more accurate information is being communicated to students regarding their academic performance. The majority of faculty members are using pluses and minuses and are satisfied with the current system.

While the data examined indicate that the system is working as intended, students dislike the system. This feeling appears to be the result of perceptions that the system is used inconsistently and that students' grade point averages are being affected negatively. However, the data examined do not indicate the presence of these perceived negative effects with the exception of the A range.

By the nature of the current system, grades in the A range are divided into A's and A-'s. Approximately 23%-25% of grades in the A range are A-'s. The Committee feels that this negative bias should be eliminated and grades in the A range should be consistent with those in the other ranges. The addition of the A+ grade makes the system more consistent, provides a designation for the very best students, provides the student who has received an A- grade the opportunity to offset it with an A+ grade, and increases the number of passing grade categories for graduate students.

Recommendation

As a result of its review of the effects of the change to a plus/minus grading system, the Undergraduate Policy Committee makes the following recommendations.

- (1) The data examined in this report regarding the effects of the plus/minus grading system should be disseminated as widely as possible among the student body.
- (2) The current grading system should be modified to include an A+ grade with 4.25 quality points.

Table 1

Undergraduate Grade Distributions
(percentages)

Term	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	D-	F	OTHER
Fall '82	23.2			30.2			23.5			6.8		5.7	10.2
Spring '83	23.8			31.3			23.2			6.8		5.5	9.1
Summer '83	24.3			31.0			22.2			5.2		4.5	12.6
Fall '83	23.3			30.9			23.4			6.4		6.0	9.8
Spring '84	24.3			31.2			22.5			6.3		6.0	9.5
Summer '84	25.8			30.1			22.0			5.8		5.1	11.2
Fall '84	18.8	5.0	5.1	21.6	4.9	4.1	17.0	3.1	1.1	4.9	.7	6.0	7.7
Spring '85	19.2	6.1	5.9	20.8	5.6	4.5	15.7	3.2	.9	4.8	.7	5.4	7.2
Summer '85	19.7	6.3	5.7	19.1	5.5	4.5	14.2	3.0	.8	4.0	.6	5.1	11.6
Fall '85	18.0	5.6	5.7	19.6	5.4	4.7	16.1	3.4	.9	4.6	.7	6.2	8.5
Spring '86	20.4	6.5	7.0	19.5	5.8	4.9	13.7	3.1	.8	3.5	.7	3.8	10.3
Summer '86	18.3	6.1	6.1	20.2	5.4	4.8	15.6	3.3	.8	4.2	.6	5.5	8.5
Fall '86	16.8	5.8	6.2	19.6	5.5	5.2	16.1	3.7	1.0	4.9	.7	6.0	7.9

Table 2

Percentage of Undergraduate Grades in Each Grade Range

Term	A	B	C	D	F	Other
Fall '82	23.2	30.2	23.5	6.8	5.7	10.2
Spring '83	23.8	31.3	23.2	6.8	5.5	9.1
Summer '83	24.3	31.0	22.2	5.2	4.5	12.6
Fall '83	23.3	30.9	23.4	6.4	6.0	9.8
Spring '84	24.3	31.2	22.5	6.3	6.0	9.5
Summer '84	25.8	30.1	22.0	5.8	5.1	11.2
Fall '84	23.8	31.6	24.2	6.7	6.0	7.7
Spring '85	25.3	32.3	23.4	6.4	5.4	7.2
Summer '85	26.0	30.3	21.7	5.4	5.1	11.6
Fall '85	23.6	30.7	24.2	6.2	6.2	8.5
Spring '86	26.9	32.3	21.7	5.0	3.8	10.3
Summer '86	24.4	31.7	23.7	5.6	5.5	8.5
Fall '86	22.6	31.3	25.0	6.6	6.0	7.9

Table 3

Percentage of Plus Grades and Minus Grades
Within Each Grade Range

Term	A-	B+	B-	C+	C-	D+	D-
Fall '84	21.0	16.1	15.5	16.9	12.8	16.4	10.4
Spring '85	24.1	18.3	17.3	19.2	13.7	14.1	10.9
Summer '85	24.2	18.8	18.2	20.7	13.8	14.8	11.1
Fall '85	23.7	18.6	17.6	19.4	14.0	14.5	11.1
Spring '86	24.2	21.7	17.9	22.5	14.3	16.0	14.0
Summer '86	25.0	19.2	17.0	20.3	13.9	14.3	10.7
Fall '86	25.7	19.8	17.6	20.8	14.8	15.2	10.6

Table 4

Number of Undergraduate Students Dismissed for Academic
Reasons and on Academic Probation

<u>Year</u>	<u>Dismissals</u>	<u>Probations</u>
1982-83*	1,763	2,033
1983-84	1,913	1,872
1984-85	1,950	1,961
1985-86	1,713	1,777

*Fall 1982, Spring 1982, and Summer 1983

Table 5

Number and Percent of Undergraduate Students Graduating with Distinction

<u>Year</u>	<u>Cum Laude (GPA 3.50)</u>		<u>Magna Cum Laude (GPA 3.70)</u>	
	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
1982-83*	214	6.1%	124	3.5%
1983-84	200	5.5%	121	3.3%
1984-85	234	6.4%	127	3.5%
1985-86	230	6.4%	129	3.6%

<u>Year</u>	<u>Summa Cum Laude (GPA 3.90)</u>		<u>Total</u>	
	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
1982-83	43	1.2%	381	10.9%
1983-84	42	1.2%	363	10.0%
1984-85	54	1.5%	415	11.4%
1985-86	40	1.1%	399	11.1%

* Fall 1982, Spring 1983, Summer 1983

Table 6

Results of Student Surveys

February 1987 Survey: Do you want a plus/minus grading system of FSU?

	Yes		No	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Freshman	59	37.1%	100	62.9%
Sophmores	70	42.2%	96	57.8%
Juniors	38	24.5%	117	75.5%
Seniors	22	21.3%	81	78.7%
Total	189	32.4%	394	67.6%

March 1986 Straw Poll:

In regard to the plus/minus grading system, which would you prefer?

(1) No change in the current grading system	206 votes	(16.3%)
(2) Dropping the pluses and minuses altogether	520 votes	(41.2%)
(3) Modification of the present system	535 votes	(42.4%)

Table 7

Results of Faculty Survey

How consistent is your use of the plus/minus system?

Always	94	(65.7%)
Sometimes	31	(21.7%)
Never	18	(12.6%)

How favorable are you to the current system?

Satisfied	106	(74.1%)
Neutral	14	(9.8%)
Not Satisfied	23	(16.1%)

Note: approximately 225 surveys were distributed; 143 responses were received.



Exhibit 1

The Florida State University
Tallahassee, Florida 32306

Office of the Student Senate
President

The Thirty-Ninth Student Senate

Resolution #22

Sponsored by: The 39th Student Senate

WHEREAS: The grading system is of tantamount concern to the students on this campus, and

WHEREAS: The Student Government Association found through a survey that more than two-thirds (2/3) of the students polled felt the grading system should be dropped, and

WHEREAS: The students of the Florida State University should have a fair chance to be competitive against graduates of other state universities, and

WHEREAS: The current plus/minus (+/-) grading system does not offer that equal opportunity to F.S.U. students, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE THIRTY-NINTH STUDENT SENATE THAT:

We encourage the Undergraduate Policy Committee move to drop the +/- grading system currently used, and modify it to a plus ("+") only grading system. If the committee does not make this motion, then a joint committee of Faculty Senate and Student Senate should be formed to find a modification that will benefit the entire student body.

OFFICIAL:

Mattie Durham
Senate Secretary

PASSED: 18th of February, 1987



"What ... young people bring to politics ... is the knowledge that there are no easy answers,
no pat solutions, no permanent panaceas for the challenges we face."