



The University of Georgia

University Council
Athens, Georgia 30602

November 24, 2009

UNIVERSITY CURRICULUM COMMITTEE – 2009-2010

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Undergraduate Student Representative – Cameron Secord

Graduate Student Representative – Robert Shostak

Dear Colleagues:

The attached proposal from the Student Government Association to standardize the grade of “C-” as a passing mark in major courses in all undergraduate majors will be an agenda item for the December 4, 2009, Full University Curriculum Committee meeting.

Sincerely,

David E. Shipley, Chair
University Curriculum Committee

cc: Dr. Arnett C. Mace, Jr.
Professor Jere W. Morehead



The University of Georgia

Student Government Association

TO: David Shipley, Chair
University Council Curriculum Committee

FROM: Cameron Secord, Vice-President *CAS*
Laura Wynn, Chair Academic Affairs Committee *LAW*
Student Government Association

RE: Proposal to standardize the grade of "C minus" as a passing grade in major courses in all undergraduate majors at the University of Georgia

DATE: November 16, 2009

Attached is a proposal to standardize the grade of "C-" as a passing mark in major courses in all undergraduate majors at the University of Georgia. After gaining student feedback and examining current inconsistencies of the plus/minus grading system in practice, we feel the need to establish equity and clarity across campus. While developing this proposal we have taken into consideration the policies of the University of Georgia's schools and colleges, the Board of Regents for the University System of Georgia and Aspirational Peer Institutions.

This proposal does not ask for the elimination of the "C-" nor does it seek to have the GPA equivalent of a "C-" altered on the 4.0 scale. Neither would it affect graduate and professional programs or schools, rather it would standardize what is required to receive course credit in undergraduate major courses regularly described as "Area F" in a student's undergraduate transcript.

Thank-you for your consideration.

cc: Dr. Arnett C. Mace, Jr.
Professor Jere W. Morehead

The University Council of The University of Georgia

Proposal to Standardize the “C-” as a Passing Grade in all Undergraduate Major Courses Across The University of Georgia Schools and Colleges.

Basic Information

Proposed Change: To standardize the “C-“ as a passing grade in all courses in all undergraduate majors across the University of Georgia.

Starting Date: At the beginning of the academic term following the academic term in which the resolution is approved.

Statement of Problem

Inconsistency exists across the various schools and colleges of The University of Georgia when interpreting and implementing the plus/minus system. The resulting inequity is illustrated by the fact that some courses and majors requiring a grade of “C-” or better to receive credit, while others require a “C” or better to receive credit.

The discrepancies found in the implementation of the “C-” portion of the plus/minus system have resulted in the following problems which require remedy:

1. Inequity and Confusion

Students, faculty and staff often encounter differences in how the “C-” is implemented because in some courses a “C-” will satisfactorily complete the class while in others “a grade of C or better is required.” This difference can be found at the school and college level as exemplified in Table 1, which demonstrates the discrepancies that exist among the Colleges and Schools at The University of Georgia. For example, Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication accepts a “C-” as a passing grade in major courses for all of the undergraduate majors within the college, but Franklin College of Arts and Sciences does not. Therefore, if a student had one major in the Grady College and another in the Franklin College, the student encounters two different standards.

Such variations are also found within some schools and colleges. For instance, in the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences and The College of Family and Consumer Sciences whether or not a “C-“ counts as a passing grade in undergraduate major courses varies by department. Students believe that this creates unnecessary confusion as they navigate their academic options and may have to retake a class if they changed a major, even if it is within the same school. Many students have voiced their concern about the inequity that results from these circumstances to the Student Government Association throughout the plus/minus systems’ trial period and since its full adoption. While 1.5% of grades earned at UGA are a “C-”, we believe that bringing equity and clarity to the grading systems will encourage students and facilitate more sound academic choices.

Table 1

College	Accept?	% of C minuses given in major courses	# of C minuses given in major courses	Total Grades
College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences	Varies by Department	2.4%	16	633
Franklin College of Arts and Sciences	No	1.8%	1025	58,230
The Terry College of Business	No	1.1%	101	9,452
The Eugene P. Odum School of Ecology	No	.7%	2	306
College of Education	No	1.2%	113	9,345
College of Environment and Design	Yes	.7%	11	1,496
College of Family and Consumer Sciences	Varies by Department	1.2%	74	6353
Daniel B. Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources	Yes	3.3%	38	1,154
Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication	Yes	.8%	34	4,337
College of Public Health	No	1.6%	21	1,339
School of Public and International Affairs	No	1.3%	69	5,156
School of Social Work	No	.3%	2	604
Total		1.5%	1506	98,405

2. Disparate Impact

These differing standards can have disparate impacts on undergraduate students who have two majors in different schools or colleges where a course overlaps as a degree requirement in both programs. For instance, a student who is both a Fashion Merchandising major in the College of Family and Consumer

Sciences and an intended business major in the Terry College of Business is required to take an introductory level accounting course (ACCT 2101). However, if the student were to receive a grade of a “C-” it would count towards their Fashion Merchandising major and not their intended business major. This performance in a course, which one of their academic programs has deemed satisfactorily completed, causes the student to either retake and repay for the course, or alter their academic intentions.

3. Aspirational Concerns

Negatively differentiated, the University of Georgia lags behind our Aspirational Peer Institutions, concerning the standardization of what counts as a passing grade in undergraduate major courses. Of the University of Georgia’s Aspirational Peer Institutions that use a plus/minus system, six out of ten accept a “C-” or lower as a passing grade in all undergraduate major courses throughout their respective institution, while the other four leave the decision to the respective colleges. Table 2 also demonstrates that of those four institutions that leave the decision to the respective college a passing grade is usually considered a “C-” or lower. The University of Georgia should follow the lead of our Aspirational Peer Institutions through ensuring equity by standardizing the “C-” as a passing grade for all undergraduate major courses.

Table 2

Aspirational Peer Institution	C- Passing?	What is Passing?
UC-Berkley	Yes	C-
Cornell	Yes	C-
U. of Michigan	Yes	D- (usually D-, but depends on college)
U. of Illinois	Yes	C- (usually C-, but depends on college)
UCLA	N/A	C (no institutional plus/minus)
U. of Minnesota	Yes	D (passing in one major is passing in all majors)
UNC-Chapel Hill	Yes	C-
Penn State	Yes	C- (usually C-, but depends on college)
U. of Wisconsin Madison	N/A	C (no institutional plus/minus)
U. of Washington	Yes	D-
U. of Virginia	Yes	D-
U. of Texas Austin	Yes	D- (usually D-, but depends on college)

4. Uncertainty

The status quo has created additional confusion among the student population with regards to HOPE Scholarship eligibility. The Board of Regents decided a grade of “C-” is to be considered as a “C” numerically, when calculating a student’s HOPE average (as demonstrated in the Board of Regents Policy excerpt 3.5.1.1 below). Students then receive information, depending on their major, that even though their performance in a class may be satisfactory for maintaining their HOPE scholarship they have to retake a course to progress in

their major. This dichotomy results in students being uncertain of their financial standing at the University as they navigate the competing standards. This unnecessary stress could easily be relieved by keeping the “C-” at a 1.7 numerically as outlined in Board of Regents Policy, but counting a “C-” as a satisfactory grade toward students’ progress just as it counts for a student’s eligibility to maintain the HOPE scholarship.

“3.5.1.1 Grades Approved in Determining the Grade Point Average” from the Board of Regents Policy Manual

...In addition, Georgia State University will be allowed to use an A+ designation, with the equivalent numerical value of a 4.30. The University of Georgia and Georgia State University shall not use plus/minus grades in the calculation of the HOPE Scholarship grade point average (BoR Minutes, February 2009)....”

5. Varying Interpretations

Depending on the course, there is the potential for conflict with the University’s former non-plus/minus policy. Some instructors have applied the plus/minus grading system in such a way as to further distinguish what would have been a “C” under the old policy. What previously was a grade sufficient to obtain course credit now falls short in the form of a “C-.” While some instructors have taken other courses of action to apply the “C-” to what would have been a “D,” to the benefit of those students it affects, this choice is not made throughout the University.

What results are varying interpretations when there should be a uniform approach that reflects the intent of the original grading system while clarifying the new plus/minus grading policy. By implementing the “C-” as a passing grade in undergraduate major courses university wide, we can set a framework from which instructors can maintain their academic freedom to set their respective standards and foster a basic consistency understood across campus.

Solution

The Student Government Association proposes that the “C-” become the standard grade required to receive course credit in all undergraduate major courses throughout all applicable schools and colleges at the University of Georgia. Standardizing the “C-” and making it consistent across all majors, departments, and course types as the standard for obtaining course credit will halt the current confusion and eliminate barriers to sound academic decisions that students currently face. We believe it will encourage students to excel by restoring equity and allowing them to further their course work at an appropriate level of academic excellence in their respective majors.