University Council

March 10, 2023

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Dear Colleagues:

The attached proposal from the College of Veterinary Medicine to create a new grade, Marginal, for the Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (D.V.M.) will be an agenda item for the March 17, 2023, Full University Curriculum Committee meeting.

Sincerely,

Susan Sanchez, Chair

cc: Provost S. Jack Hu
Dr. Marisa Pagnattaro

College of Veterinary Medicine
501 D.W. Brooks Drive
Athens, Georgia 30602
www.vet.uga.edu

March 3, 2023

University Curriculum Committee
University of Georgia
Office of the Registrar
104 Caldwell Hall
Athens, GA 30602

Dear Dr. Susan Sanchez:

The Faculty of the College of Veterinary Medicine (CVM) respectfully requests the addition of "Marginal" as a new grade option for the Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM) professional program.

We will implement the Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory (S/U) grading system beginning in Fall 2023 for the DVM class of 2027 and future classes; however, our preference is to include Marginal (M) as a third course grade option. This new grading system (S/M/U) will complement the implementation of the new didactic curriculum in the first three years of the DVM program.

Please refer to the attached documentation for definitions, justification, and data supporting the addition of the M grade for the DVM professional program.

Sincerely,

Lisa K Nolan, DVM, PhD
Georgia Athletic Association Distinguished Professor and Dean

Andrew Parks, MA, Vet MB, DACVS
Interim Associate Dean for Academic and Student Affairs

Attachment: M Grade Proposal

Proposal for Marginal (M) Grade for the DVM Professional Program

The Faculty of the College of Veterinary Medicine (CVM) respectfully requests the addition of "Marginal" as a new grade option to be used with the existing Satisfactory and Unsatisfactory options in the Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM) professional program.

Definition
The grading system at the University of Georgia includes Satisfactory and Unsatisfactory, defined here:

S	This grade indicates satisfactory participation in certain required courses. Normally, S grades are given in a limited number of professional, seminar, or graduate-level courses. Credit is included in hours earned. The grade is not included in the grade point average computation.
U	This symbol indicates unsatisfactory performance in certain required courses in which S grades may normally be given. No credit is given. The grade is not included in the grade point average computation.

We suggest the following definition for the Marginal grade:

M	This symbol indicates **minimal passing performance** in certain required courses in which S or U grades may normally be given. Credit is included in hours earned. The grade is not included in the grade point average computation.

The percentages for Satisfactory, Marginal, and Unsatisfactory will be evaluated each year prior to the first day of the course and included in each course syllabus. For the initial year of use, each course will follow this scale:

Satisfactory (S): ≥73%
Marginal (M): 60-72%
Unsatisfactory (U): <60%

Justification
The CVM faculty determined that moving away from the A-F grading system is an important component of competency-based veterinary education and the revision of the Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM) professional program; moving away from the A-F grading will also bring the CVM in line with the preclinical grading system adopted by most medical schools.

We will implement the Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory (S/U) course grading system beginning in Fall 2023 for the DVM class of 2027 and future classes; however, our preference is to include Marginal (M) as a third course grade option. This new S/M/U grading system will complement

the implementation of the new didactic curriculum in the first three years of the DVM professional program. The M grade will serve several purposes, detailed below.

Identify Need for Academic Support
The Marginal grade will be used in the same manner that the D grade is presently used in the traditional A-F grading system. Currently, D grades provide an opportunity for the college to identify students who have not yet achieved an acceptable foundational understanding of the subject matter and thus, need remediation prior to advancement through the DVM curriculum. Students receiving a D grade are initially placed on academic probation and are referred for remediation. If the student has more than one D grade, an overall academic performance review is initiated to determine if the student should be permitted to progress in the program, remediate further, or be dismissed (very rare). We plan to use the M grade in the same manner. Without the M grade, it is possible that students at the lowest end of the Satisfactory range in a course might not be identified to receive remediation. Furthermore, making the case for dismissal following multiple, low-end Satisfactory grade scores (in the proposed marginal range) seems contradictory and may present a legal liability.

Tracking Student Performance Over Time
Administratively, the addition of the M grade would be very helpful in overall tracking of student performance. Grade reports generated through the University grade reporting system make no distinction between low and high S grades. Without an M grade, we will have to maintain additional documentation to monitor student performance that may be of concern. While this is logistically possible, having the addition of the M grade available via Argos grade reports would reduce the risk of human error or the inadvertent oversight of a student who may need remediation support.

Transparency for Students
The addition of the M grade on student transcripts would also be a good visual representation to students struggling academically in a given area. The CVM faculty already voted to move away from A-F grading for multiple reasons. To obtain a license to practice, students must pass the North American Veterinary Licensing Examination (NAVLE). Historically, students who might have received one or more Ds would know what areas they need to concentrate on prior to taking the NAVLE. With a strict S/U grading system, a student that receives all S grades on their grade report may feel they are performing ‘on track’ and may not realize they may not be adequately prepared for this exam. The M grade would provide a visual representation of their progress and alert them to possible areas where they are in need of support.

Experiences at Peer Institutions
Adopting a Satisfactory/Marginal/Unsatisfactory grading system will place the UGA College of Veterinary Medicine on the leading edge of assessment practice in veterinary medical education. Dr. Leslie Sprunger, Associate Dean of Academic Affairs at the Washington State University College of Veterinary Medicine and past chair of the American Association of Veterinary Medical Colleges Academic Affairs Committee did an informal survey of the committee members in 2022 and shared the preliminary data with us on March 2, 2023. Over

the past few years, we notice a trend of DVM programs beginning to move from letter or numerical grading schemes to pass-fail or modified pass-fail. Unfortunately, the data do not distinguish between the latter two schemes.

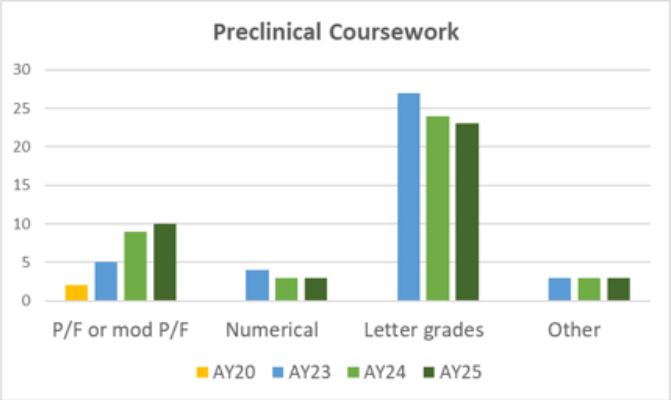


Image from personal correspondence with Dr. Leslie Sprunger, Associate Dean of Academic Affairs, Washington State University College of Veterinary Medicine, March 2023

We have communicated with three other colleges of veterinary medicine who have already adopted either a Satisfactory/Marginal/Unsatisfactory or Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory grading system. These include Washington State University, whose CVM has used an S/M/U grading system since 2006 and North Carolina State University, who moved to this grading system in 2020. Both report that the S/M/U system has supported their curricular and assessment needs, and both have received favorable feedback from students. Washington State University includes a question about their Pass/Marginal/Fail grading system in their Senior Exit Survey, and over 89% of the students were in favor of the P/M/F grading system. Our colleagues at the Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine did not have an option to implement a Marginal grade when they moved to the Pass/Fail grading system in 2016 and have agreed that it would be useful for all of the purposes listed above.

Feedback from Our Current DVM Students

We surveyed the leadership of our current DVM classes as well as curriculum committee student representatives, and they were supportive of the S/M/U grading system. The third- and fourth-year students surveyed all strongly agreed that “the addition of the M grade to the S/U grading system in the new curriculum will be well-received by the student body.” Some of the class officers expressed initial concerns regarding the S/U grading scheme and feel the addition of the M grade will help identify students who are struggling so that they may receive help. A class officer in the second-year class said this:

> “I know the remediation program works with students who are in the marginal area between passing and failing classes in our current academic evaluation system. Adding the “Marginal” classification in the S/U system will allow the college to keep a closer eye on the students that are in the grey performance area.”

A class officer in the first-year class had a similar response:

> "I agree 100% with the addition of the "M" grade and it provides a solution to the concerns that I am sure many have when considering a S/U grading system. My immediate concerns are: How can we ensure that the students barely getting by are getting the help they need, and how can we be aware of their progress to ensure they are on track for success? Both of these concerns were answered in your justification for the "M" grade towards the end of your document. I think they were very good justifications and I envision the M grade being a very useful addition to the S/U grading system."

Remediation and Accreditation

The UGA CVM is accredited by the American Veterinary Medical Association Council on Education (CoE). The curriculum and student well-being are an important parts of the accreditation process, and the success of students in the program and their well-being are integrally related. Therefore, the CoE is concerned that appropriate remediation is provided as needed, and the presence of the M grade and its use would affirm our commitment to remediating students who have performed poorly in the accreditation process.

From: Andrew Parks
Sent: Thursday, March 9, 2023 2:59 PM
To: Marisa Anne Pagnattaro
Subject: S/U grading in the DVM program with a potential M grade.

Dear Marisa,

Dean Nolan contacted me this morning indicating that the Provost had contacted her with concerns about our request for a Marginal (M) grade. She indicated to me that the Provost didn't see the need for an additional grade, and if we did, why not stick with A-F grading. She has asked me to respond I will try to give the best answer I can. There is significant evidence in the literature that S/U grading in medical schools decreases student stress/increases their wellbeing without decreasing academic performance, and as the DVM is also a very stressful program, S/U grading seems to be a step in the right direction for our student's wellbeing.

With regard to the use of an M grade, it would function much in the way a D grade does, and we use D grades heavily to determine the need for remediation and referral to the College Scholarship and Appeals Committee. The D/M grade requires that the student remediate to a standard of competency, without receiving an F grade, and with satisfactory remediation allows them to continue in the curriculum. An F means at best that they have to repeat the course which is difficult in our curriculum because the courses are only offered once a year.

Thus our major concern is identifying students who have performed poorly but with remediation could continue in the curriculum and differentiating them from those that receive an F that need to repeat the course.

I have spoken with the associate deans for academic affairs at three of the four institutions that currently use S/U grading throughout the curriculum; two of them have an M grade and one does not. The school that does not tries to identify students that have done poorly and catch them solely based on percentage score, but it leaves some students with poor scores thinking they have done satisfactorily because they receive an S and their associate dean is concerned about that.

It boils down to giving the students an unsatisfactory, a low pass, or a pass, and if the difficulty is related to the terminology, something like low pass would work just as well as an M. If it isn't related to terminology we would have to rely on identifying them solely based on percentage and it is feasible that we could end up dismissing a student that only has satisfactory grades on their transcript.

I am not sure if this has satisfactorily addressed the mentioned concerns, and if I need to provide any more information, I will do my best to do so. Sherry Clouser emailed Fiona Liken with our responses to questions that you may or may not have seen, so I will attach them regardless.

Thanks

Andy