

SM 2/10/67

Grading

Paper S-46

To: Senate

From: Registrar

22 September, 1967

Subject: Undergraduate Grading System.

1. The Necessity for a Fine Structure

The following table portrays the present grading system:

<u>Letter grade</u>	<u>Permanent Record Numerical Value</u>	<u>Scholarship Numerical Value</u>
A+	4	4.5
A	4	4.0
B+	3	3.5
B	3	3.0
B-	3	2.5
C	2	2.0
C-	2	1.5
D	1	1.0
F	0	0
N	0	0
DEF	0	0

The justification for a finer scale of numerical values for the determination of scholarships is its spreading effect. That is, of X students achieving a GPA of 3.5 on the 4 point scale, some may be over 3.5 and some below 3.5 on the finer scale. This spreading effect is necessary in the case of scholarships such as the B.C. Government awards where the number of awards is limited in number.

The proposal of the Arts Faculty to further increase the fine structure would provide an increased spreading effect, but the spreading effect we have now is sufficient.

2. "Administrative" Aspects of Change

There are no objections to changing the present grading system based on administrative criteria. There would be some costs involved in re-programming for the computer and reprinting certain forms, but not sufficient to affect the decision one way or the other..

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3. External Views

The grading system at Simon Fraser has been changed once since the University opened two years ago. To change it again probably would not be a serious concern to other Universities or award-granting agencies, but I suggest we do establish some period of time during which the system would exist unchanged for fear outsiders might begin to have doubts about our competency, and judge our students accordingly.

4. Use of the Grading System

Whatever grading system we use is a matter of little importance compared to how we use it. The recent report of the Examination and Grading Practices Committee showed some wide fluctuations in grading practice. In this day of "money for marks" it is obviously of vital concern to the student that there be some common standard in the use of the grading system.

In addition to the problem of skewing the distribution of grades to one end of the scale or the other, there is the further problem of instructors who do not use the fine scale. There is no evidence that this is happening now, but it has often been suggested that those who want a 4 point scale can have what they want by assigning only A's, B's, C's, D's and F's. If this suggestion is put into practice it would undoubtedly have an effect on students' chances of securing financial assistance.

5. Recommendation for Change

If Senate does change the Grading System I would strongly urge that the letter grade N be dropped. The N grade was originally intended to cover those students who did not write the final examination. It is a carry-over from a system where final examinations were universal and counted for the majority of the final grade assigned.

Since Simon Fraser has a wide range of practices ranging from no final examination through variations of weight placed on the final to 100% of the grade being assigned on the final, the letter grade N is anomalous. If a student does not complete the work required in a course and the instructor sees no reason to grant a DEF grade, then the student should be given an F grade, since has indeed failed the course.

D. P. Robertson
Registrar

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Grading

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

MEMORANDUM

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To The Registrar

From John Matthews
Dean of Arts

Subject Grades A- and C+

Date September 19, 1967

As required by the Chairman of the last meeting of Senate I submit the attached paper in support of the motion tabled at that meeting that the grades A- and C+ be added to the existing scale of grading for courses.

John Matthews

JM:els
encl.

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Grading for Evaluation of Courses

I have examined the relevant arguments on this question as set out in the minutes of earlier meetings of Senate and my submission is as follows.

1. Definition of terms for the purpose of this paper.

(a)	11 point scale	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
		A+	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D	F
(b)	4 point scale	A			B			C		D		F
		4			3			2		1		0

2. Usage.

In the 1966/67 calendar, p.38, a 10-point scale was laid down, C- being excluded. In the 1967/68 calendar, p.44, appeared the 9-point scale now in force. A- and C+ were omitted, and C- reinstated.

These facts prompt the following observation. A member of faculty who has had some years of marking, according to a particular scale, has great difficulty in changing to a scale differing by one or two points from that with which he has been familiar. Novitiates into teaching would not experience this difficulty. The permutation practiced in the above two calendar entries seems to have been calculated to throw everyone, experienced and inexperienced, into such a confusion in their task of grading student attainment as could hardly have been bettered.

3. On June 6, 1966 Dean Cunningham reported to Senate the Arts Faculty's earnest request for restoration of the A- and C+ grades, i.e. for the 11-point scale as set out above. Discussion at that meeting of Senate and again on August 29, 1966 showed that the Science Faculty in general preferred a 4-point scale. Points made in discussion were that the Scholarship and Awards Committee requires a fine structure to guide their decisions; that the grading system used ought to be compatible with percentage systems, and with the 4-point system used in American universities. It is not clear what was envisaged as a percentage system. Below the pass mark, whatever that may be, there can only be one point. Above the pass mark grouping can be arranged in various ways. It is submitted therefore, that percentage systems cannot be considered relevant to this question. On August 29, 1966 Senate endorsed the 4-point grade system for external use. The Registrar and the computer could, if necessary, ignore all pluses and minuses in their records. I have consulted with members of the Arts Faculty and the general consensus appears to be that a 4-point system would be preferred to the present system.

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The following conclusions are submitted.

1. The 11-point system and the 4-point system can easily live together.
2. Either is preferred to any compromise between them.
3. For scholarship and other award decisions either the 11-point system must be used or the Scholarships and Awards Committee must in almost every case have recourse to departments for additional information to enable them to reach just decisions.

In conclusion I wish to stress the importance of custom to individual members of faculty if they are to achieve maximum justice in their grading of student performance. The 11-point system can be easily adapted by individuals to any course or scale to which they may be accustomed.

I submit that this consideration and conclusion 3 above tilts the balance of argument in favour of the motion now before Senate.

(Sd.) John Matthews

September 19, 1967.

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

MEMORANDUM

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To Mr. D.P. Robertson

Secretary, Senate

Subject SFU Grading System

From J.F. Ellis

Acting Dean of Education

Date September 25, 1967

14733-PC

The Senate, at its meeting on September 11, 1967, requested comments from the Faculties on the proposal by the Faculty of Arts that the grading scale at Simon Fraser University be changed in the direction of providing the opportunity for finer discriminations on student performance.

The existing grading system was accepted by the Faculty of Education at its meeting of April 4, 1966. The voting in favour of the scale was 16 for, 3 against. I think it is fair to say that the Faculty of Education is as aware as any group, and more aware than some, of the limitations of any grading system. Our pessimism about devising a "perfect" grading scale arises from at least the following:

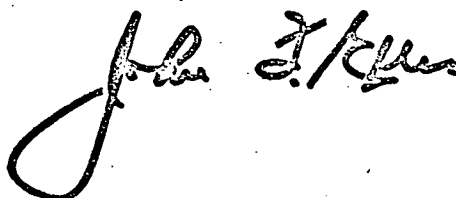
1. No evaluation can ever take into account all aspects of a learner's performance.
2. All evaluation procedures are subject, to a greater or lesser degree, to the biases of the evaluator.
3. Many grading systems can be destructive of the relationship between teacher and student.
4. Many of the devices used for evaluation in universities do not uncover some of the most important objectives that the professor may have.

For these reasons and for many others, the Faculty of Education at its April 4 meeting, agreed to support the present grading scale - though with a greater or lesser degree of uneasiness.

The attention of Senate should now be directed to the following consideration:

The University is two years old. The present grading scale is the second system that has been used since the University opened. A change in the present scale will undoubtedly lead to confusion among students and difficulty in the interpretation of student records, both on this campus and on other campuses.

JFE/ph



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STATEMENT TO SENATE ON GRADING PRACTICES

I have been asked to set out the reasons why the present nine-point grading system in use in the University does not include A- and C+. The reasons are relatively simple. The simplest grading system which the University could use, and which would be in keeping with that used in other North American universities, would involve the passing grades ABCD. When the Committee met in the spring of 1966 to consider grading in Simon Fraser University, an important issue was the need to differentiate between students with similar grade point averages in the awarding of scholarships. No doubt the Registrar can amplify the reasoning behind this statement more fully than I can. We therefore argued that the most likely place where problems will arise will be in the B grade, which was therefore divided into B+, B, and B-. As additional fine structure in the system, C and A both had extra grades placed within them to identify the exceptionally bright student at A+, and the one who has got a bare pass at C-. In other words, this does not represent the removal of A- and C+ from an eleven-point scheme, but rather the insertion of A+, B+, B- and C- around a four-point scheme.

Having identified the rationale, however, I must say that the present argument does not appear to be taking place along rational lines. The Science Faculty is used to the ABCD scheme, and believes that this is the scheme that it can work most efficiently. The Arts Faculty on the other hand, as I understand their views, are used to working with an eleven-point scale; when faced with a paper which they intuitively feel merits A- or C+, they are forced to give another grade which they feel is wronging the students in some way. It is relatively easy for somebody with a mathematical background to point out that the difference between the present scale and that to which many members of the Arts Faculty have an allegiance is the difference between nine points and eleven points; unfortunately, this statement seems to be rather meaningless to many people.

As I have pointed out previously, the present grading system is the result of a compromise. I think we should give the compromise every opportunity to work and allow everybody to get used to it for a few years before we throw it overboard. As a representative of the Faculty of Science, I must point out finally that to reject a compromise which was arrived at by supposedly democratic methods is not likely to increase the faith of the Faculty of Science in the outcome of any future negotiations on similar matters.

D. G. Tuck