

To: All Members of Senate

From: H. M. Evans
Secretary of Senate
and Registrar.

Subject: Notices of Motion on "N" and
"F" grades; B.D'Aoust
Changes of Grades - W.Williams.
Comments of Secretary.

Date: February 20, 1969.

The Secretary was requested to add his comments when the above-mentioned notices of motion were circulated. The notices, and comments, appear below.

1. Notice of Motion - B.D'Aoust

"Whereas there is no direction by Senate to the Registrar regarding the handling of "N" and "DEF" grades for purposes of calculating either cumulative or semester grade point averages, and

Whereas the present practice (1) may penalize the student - he may not get a bursary or scholarship for which he is qualified by his other marks - and (2) since the computing of an average which includes an "N" or "DEF" grade carrying a zero value in fact results in an erroneous reflection of a student's achievement and (3) since the trouble involved in re-programming the computer to calculate averages accurately is easily offset by the reliability of the information printed out,

Moved, (1) that where grades of "N" and "DEF" are awarded by an instructor, these be left intact on the student's record unless changed according to present University policy, and (2) that in calculating grade point averages, computation be based only on passing or failing grades awarded by instructors.

Comment - Motion No.1 intends to record academic evaluation of a student's performance more accurately, Motion No.2 is intended to arrive at averages on the basis of academic rather than administrative judgments."

Comments by Registrar

(a) Paragraph 1 -

- (i) It is my understanding that Senate has given direction to the Registrar regarding the handling of "N" and "DEF" grades for purposes of calculating semester grade point averages, cumulative grade point averages, and graduation grade point averages.

Attention is drawn to the 1968/69 Undergraduate Calendar, Page 46, which states that the mark for each course will be entered on the student's record by a letter grade and a numerical equivalent, for which "N" is "0", and "DEF" is "0".

The calendar also states that the letter grade "N" is given when a student registered for a course but did not write the examination and did not withdraw before the set date, and that an "N" is considered as "F" for purposes of scholastic standing.

The calendar also sets forth the general conditions on the basis of which a "DEF" grade may be awarded, with reference to medical documentation and compassionate grounds, or when the instructor in the course wishes to defer submitting a final mark pending completion of further work from the student.

- (ii) In practice, when a "DEF" grade is submitted there is a time lapse for conversion of the grade by the instructor, from the time of the original submission up to the Friday at the end of the week in which classes commence in the semester following. (This amounted to a minimum of over three weeks last semester). If not then converted to a regular grade the "DEF" becomes an "F". There is further protection provided the student, however, in that on petition of the Head of the Department in special cases the Senate Committee on Undergraduate Admissions and Standings may grant a further extension.
- (iii) Considerable time is allowed for the official dropping of a course in which a student is registered. If so dropped no entry appears in final records. This semester the final date for course drop is March 14.

If a student does not drop the course he has the opportunity to complete the required work, including examinations where given, for his final grading, whether passing or failing. If a student undertakes to not write examinations he receives the "N" or failing grade. In the event that the "N" grade were not considered as an "F" and were not included in the average any student likely to be unsuccessful would have an undue advantage in not writing and taking the "N" grade rather than in writing and receiving "F".

In view of the protracted time for the official dropping of a course to avoid an "N" or "F" grade, there seems no substantive argument against current regulations. It is my view that the alternative proposed would be very inequitable and would have serious impact on current academic standards.

Note that if there are medical or other substantial reasons preventing the student from undertaking the examinations the provisions for the "DEF" grade exist.

- (iv) Attention is drawn to Senate Minutes, December 4, 1968, Pages 2-4, and to Paper S.177A, Page 2, in which it is indicated that grades of "N" and "DEF" will be used in calculating semester and cumulative grade-point averages but not in calculating graduation averages.
- (b) Paragraph 2 -

As indicated above there is a difference between "N" and "DEF" grades in that "N" grades rather clearly are failing grades and

are so recorded, whereas the "DEF" grade may potentially be a passing or failing grade, but temporarily carries a "0" value until final decision is made.

When decision is being made on such items as scholarships, bursaries, requiring a student to withdraw and related matters, the absence of a definitive grade (as when "DEF" appears), presents some temporary problems most of which can be overcome. The problem would exist whether the "DEF" be recorded as zero, or left out of calculation, assuming that cognizance be taken of the "DEF". Failure to include the course would give too high an average if the "DEF" proves to be an "F", and too low an average if the "DEF" becomes a passing grade.

In practice, if review is being made to determine whether or not a student should be required to withdraw the Senate Committee is expected to look at the remainder of the record for the semester, or earlier where required. If a ruling is amended when the final grading is reported corrective action is initiated. Indeed, there would be some advantage to a slightly earlier date for submission of final grades to replace "DEF".

In the case of scholarships, the bulk are the Government awards, and to qualify a student must have recorded at least 15 semester hours of work. In most cases if a student has a "DEF" grade he would lack units. In any event, if a student applying for Government scholarship changes from non-qualification to qualification through any grade change, ("DEF" or other), the Department of Education is notified and the award authorized. Each semester there are a number of such changes, but to date the Department has honoured them.

In the case of Government bursaries, awards are determined for the year in late August only, and some difficulties can occur on the summer semester results, but as these are reviewed with the University decision can be made on individual records, and where necessary internal resources should be used to correct anomalies.

(c) Paragraph 3 -

- (i) Grades of "N" remain as "N", and grades of "DEF" are converted in keeping with present University policy and regulations.
- (ii) Current regulations call for calculating grades of "N" and "DEF" in semester and cumulative grade-point averages but not in calculating graduation averages. (See reference item i a iv above).

2. Notice of Motion - W. Williams

DEF

"that the time for conversion of grades be extended until the last day to drop courses in the semester following the awarding of the grade."

Comments by Registrar

- (a) Current requirements call for submission of grade changes by Friday at the end of the week in which classes commence in the semester following. (This amounted to a minimum of over three weeks last semester).

There is further protection provided in that on petition of the Head of the Department in special cases the Senate Committee on Undergraduate Admissions and Standings may grant later change.

- (b) The time provided seems lengthy, with protection for special cases, unless the intent of the motion is to permit a student time past the semester end to raise a grade by further work. If this be the intent the whole matter of philosophy and practice would require review as there would be significant impact.

As a current practical problem the awarding of Government scholarships would require consideration since the calculations for the numbers of awards are based on semester-end results, with provision for minimum amendments.

- (c) There currently are some difficulties in the matter of the nature of documentation and reasons on the basis of which the Senate Committee should authorize late change. The Committee has considered referral to the new Standing Committee on Examination Gradings and Practices.
- (d) As no reasons have been set forth concerning the purpose of the motion further comment at this time seems inappropriate.

Summary Comment

The two motions as currently stated could have major impact on academic standards and on current requirements. Both are concerned with gradings and practices. If they are to be considered in depth referral for study by the Senate Standing Committee on Examination Gradings and Practices would seem appropriate.