

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

S.79-108

MEMORANDUM

SENATE

From. SENATE COMMITTEE ON UNDERGRADUATE
STUDIES

Subject. RECOMMENDATIONS - POLICY GUIDELINES
FOR GRADING PRACTICES

Date. OCTOBER 23, 1979

Action undertaken by the Senate Committee on Undergraduate Studies at its meeting of October 9, 1979 leads to the motion which follows:

MOTION: "That Senate approve, as set forth in S.79-108, the proposed Policy Guidelines for Grading Practices."

Paper S.79-88 on this topic was discussed at the Senate meeting of October 1, 1979. At that time an amendment was proposed for page 3 of the document, "Should Departments have guidelines on expected distributions in particular types of courses they will be made public prior to the beginning of the course and will be accompanied by a rationale for the expected distribution. Instructors may be required to justify major deviations from these norms."

There was considerable debate on the proposed amendment and Senate referred the item back to SCUS for further consideration. Meanwhile there was attempt to proceed further with the document at the meeting. After further discussion Senate approved the following motion: "That this paper be referred back to the Committee with understanding there will be opportunity to raise issues on which there is concern." Senate moved into committee of the whole to clarify referral and a number of points were raised but without clear agreement on some of the items.

The Committee considered the amendment which had been proposed at Senate and approved the first sentence to be added as the last paragraph of Section II, page 1 of the Policy Guidelines statement.

In view of the debate at Senate and the further consideration of the Committee, the second sentence of the earlier proposed amendment was deleted.

The Committee considered also other points which had been raised at Senate but agreed unanimously that further changes to the paper should not be made. It noted that the paper over the years had undergone extensive scrutiny and that the paper as now presented represented the efforts of the Committee to accommodate the various viewpoints which had been expressed.

For additional background information the transmittal memo submitted to Senate with Paper S.79-88 is included with this submission.

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

MEMORANDUM

S.79-88

SENATE

From SENATE COMMITTEE ON UNDERGRADUATE STUDIES

H. M. EVANS, SECRETARY

Subject RECOMMENDATIONS - POLICY GUIDELINES
FOR GRADING PRACTICES

Date SEPTEMBER 12, 1979

Action undertaken at a series of meetings of SCUS in 1977, 1978 and lastly on September 11, 1979 leads to the motion which follows:

MOTION: "That Senate approve, as set forth in S.79-88, the proposed Policy Guidelines for Grading Practices."

General Background Information

1. i) In September 1976 Senate approved motion as follows:

"That Senate direct the Senate Committee on Undergraduate Studies to review grading standards and procedures and to report back to Senate regarding appropriate policy guidelines for grading."

- ii) SCUS established a sub-committee which, after several meetings, presented its report to SCUS. The Chairman of SCUS chaired the sub-committee. That report was discussed extensively at SCUS and many revisions were made. In its revised form it was distributed in July 1977 to the Student Society, to Chairmen of Departments, and to Deans for comments and suggested revisions.

Those responses were discussed at a number of meetings of SCUS in the late Spring of 1978. The earlier months of Spring 1978 were devoted to the "Report on Grading," which was paralleling in part the "Recommendations on Grading Practices." Lengthy documents had been received from some areas on each of these documents (notably from Science). The "Report on Grading" was submitted to Senate last year and approved with some revisions. Discussion continued at SCUS and elsewhere on the "Recommendations on Grading Practices."

- iii) A procedure had been adopted by SCUS for considering the "Report on Grading" and a similar procedure was adopted for the "Recommendations on Grading Practices."

The responses to the July 1977 enquiry were summarized and tabulated and a series of motions (with alternatives) were listed to focus discussion at SCUS. The material provided to SCUS included (1) copy of the SCUS report distributed broadly in 1977, (2) copy of responses received, (3) a summary tabulation of responses by items, (4) a suggested procedure for dealing with the topics with motions and alternatives.

At a series of meetings commencing May 2, 1978, SCUS considered and revised the original report. Meetings were held May 2, May 23, May 30, June 6, June 20, 1978. The last action taken by SCUS on June 20, 1978 was to approve motion as follows:

"That the revised paper be forwarded to the Student Society for comment and to Deans of Faculty for any further Faculty comments, for return to SCUS for final consideration before transmittal to Senate. Any comments are required by the Chairman and by the Secretary of SCUS not later than July 31, 1978."

The action of forwarding was undertaken with covering memorandum dated June 21, 1978, entitled "Recommendations - Policy Guidelines for Grading Practices," with copies to the President of the Student Society, to Deans of Faculties and to Chairmen of Faculty Undergraduate Curriculum Committees. The paper then attached, "Policy Guidelines for Grading Practices," incorporated all changes made by SCUS up to June 20, 1978 inclusive and represented the position at that time.

- iv) In its earlier communications to the various bodies SCUS emphasized that its intention was to clarify the role of Department Chairman as a collegial one emphasizing the Chairman's responsibility in upholding what is expected to be a common departmental concern for the maintenance of academic standards. In outlining specifically the procedures for reconsideration of a grade SCUS did not wish to nullify practices which were currently working effectively but to ensure that the parties involved were cognizant of general expectations and responsibilities. Departments with explicit procedures were invited to submit copies with responses to the proposed policy guidelines.
- v) All responses received to that 1978 enquiry were distributed to SCUS members, were summarized and tabulated and a series of alternative motions were presented in a procedure similar to that previously followed. Final discussion was held at the SCUS meeting of September 11, 1979 resulting in the attached paper - Policy Guidelines on Grading Practices now recommended to Senate by the Senate Committee on Undergraduate Studies for approval.

I. OBJECTIVES

1. To set forth the basis of grading practices at SFU and, specifically to clarify:

- a) the basis on which grades will be assigned.
- b) the responsibilities of the instructor and the Department Chairman with respect to grading, and
- d) the responsibilities of the student, the instructor, the Department Chairman, and the Dean with respect to reconsideration of a grade, and the place of Senate in such reconsideration.

2. On the basis of 1. above, to ensure continued maintenance of high academic standards, reasonably consistent and equitable evaluation practices within and across courses, and appropriate procedures on grade reconsiderations.

II. THE BASIS ON WHICH GRADES WILL BE ASSIGNED

This paper is not designed to restrict unduly the basis on which final grades for a course are assigned, but to stress that students, the instructor and the Chairman should know in advance the general basis for awarding of grades. This may include in various combinations such items as results on a mid-term examination, a final examination, frequent tests throughout the term, classroom attendance/participation, projects, term papers, essays, laboratory work, evidence of extensive reading and so forth. There should be clear indication of the general procedures to be followed in arriving at the final grade. Grades will reflect demonstrated achievement in course objectives.

In addition, students should know the general manner in which a grade will be assigned for any specific work required throughout the term. For example, if an essay is to be graded for style, format or documentation the student should be informed of that.

Should departments have guidelines on expected distributions in particular types of courses they will be made public prior to the beginning of the course and will be accompanied by a rationale for the expected distribution.

III. GRADINGA. Responsibilities of the instructor

1. To provide the Department Chairman (normally six weeks in advance of the start of the semester), with a course outline and a statement of the course requirements and how these will be related to course grades. If circumstances require a change in requirements, to provide such statement of such changes to students within the first week of classes. Course outlines usually should advise students of allocation of marks as between final exams, mid-term exams, tests, term papers, tutorial participation, projects, laboratory work and any other requirements.

(2)

2. To grade and return as promptly as possible mid-term, essays, and other course requirements. (See III. A. 4.; IV. 5., 6.)

3. To provide the Chairman, upon request, with a clear rationale for whatever grading approach is proposed. (See III. B. 2., 3.)

If a Department Chairman is unwilling to accept a proposed grading approach the instructor would have recourse to the Faculty Dean whose resolution of the matter would be considered final.

4. To maintain clear records of the marks given and to weighting of those marks to establish a final grade and to ensure that those records and any student work retained (exams, essays, etc.,) are kept for at least one semester following the end of the semester (and after that until any outstanding request for reconsideration of a grade is resolved). Such records and material will be available to the Department Chairman on request, and should be filed with the Department for the subsequent semester if the instructor will be absent.

5. To attempt to resolve each request from a student for reconsideration of a grade and to cooperate with the Department Chairman in the resolution of any request the instructor is unable to resolve directly. (See IV. 2., 3., 4.)

B. Responsibilities of the Department Chairman

1. To obtain from instructors and make available to students (normally six weeks in advance of the start of the semester), course outlines including statements of course requirements and how these will be related to course grades. (See III. A. 1.)

2. To consider requests from instructors to assign letter grades on some basis other than that stated in II. above and to approve those requests in which the evidence suggests the alternative approach is warranted. (See III. A. 3.)

In special cases - after the first week of classes to consider, and then approve or disapprove, requests from instructors with class approval to assign letter grades on some basis other than that stated in III. A. 1.

3. To review with the instructor the grades assigned in each course in order to ascertain that grading has been done with reference to academic achievement (unless some other basis has been approved in advance), and that it is consistent with the course requirements and basis stated in advance, and to countersign the grade sheet for a course when he/she is satisfied that students in the course have been graded appropriately. (See III. A. 1., 3.)

If a Department Chairman has refused to sign an instructor's grade sheet, it is expected that the faculty member concerned and the Chairman will do everything possible to resolve the difference and, failing that, the faculty member

would have recourse to the Faculty Dean whose resolution of the matter would be considered final.

4. To review grading practices from time to time in consultation with all faculty members of the department, to encourage the department to consider issues related to grading, and to encourage consistency in grading practices within the department.

5. To assist an instructor and a student in achieving fair reconsideration of a grade in the event the instructor and student are unable to achieve such reconsideration without assistance. (See III. A. 5.)

IV. RECONSIDERATION OF A GRADE

1. A student who is unclear about course requirements or the basis for grading, or who is concerned about the marking of a particular assignment, is expected to seek clarification or to express his concern to the instructor in a timely manner.

2. The student who is seeking reconsideration of his/her final grade in a course is expected to raise his/her concern with the course instructor without delay. (See III. A. 5.)

A grade reconsideration may raise the grade, or lower the grade, or leave the grade unchanged.

3. The student who is unable to contact the course instructor, or who receives no reply from the course instructor after a reasonable period of time, or who wishes to pursue a request for reconsideration of a grade after receiving a response from the instructor, may present his/her request together with the reasons for it in writing to the Chairman of the Department in which the course is offered - normally within sixty days of the release of grades.

4. The Chairman shall first seek to resolve the concern by dealing with the student and the instructor. If it cannot be resolved at that level it is the responsibility of the Chairman, after consultation with the student and the instructor, to arrange for a re-evaluation of the work on which the grade was based by an appropriately qualified person(s) and the establishing of a grade based on that re-evaluation, or to take such other steps as are necessary. Should the student request anonymity in such a re-evaluation reasonable steps shall be taken to ensure it.

5. In the event of a request for reconsideration of a grade, it is the student's responsibility to provide all the relevant work which has been returned to him or her and it is the instructor's responsibility to provide all relevant work which has been retained. (See III. A., 2., 4.)

6. In a course which includes a final examination the marked examinations shall be retained by the instructor or, if the instructor is to be away from the campus, all pertinent papers and items are to be filed with the department to be retained for at least one semester following the semester in which they were written. (Should a request for reconsideration still be pending longer than one semester later, the marked examinations for that course will be retained as long as it is pending.) (See III. A. 4.)

7. The student who is concerned that his/her request for reconsideration has been dealt with inappropriately at the departmental level may convey his/her concern to the Dean of the Faculty. The Dean will review the events and

- a) confirm the grade awarded at the departmental level if he/she is satisfied there is no new evidence and that judicious and proper procedures have been followed in the reconsideration at that level.
- b) if there appears to be significant evidence not considered at the departmental level, the Dean may refer the reconsideration back to the Department Chairman with instructions.
- c) initiate reconsideration (by alternative means where necessary) if, in his/her judgment, the matter cannot be resolved at the departmental level.

The decision of the Dean shall be final, subject only to an appeal to Senate. Such appeal may go forward only with the permission of the Chairman of Senate on clear evidence satisfactory to her/him that there have been improper procedures in reconsideration as undertaken. The Chairman of Senate periodically will report to Senate on the disposition and nature of such requests to appeal to Senate which have not gone forward to that body.