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MEMORANDUM

ATTENTION:	Senate	**DATE:**	December 6, 2024
FROM:	Zareen Naqvi, Institutional Research and Planning (IRP)	**PAGES:**	**1 of 1**
RE:	IRP Reports for Information		

At a meeting of Senate held on September 9, 2024, changes were requested to 2 reports provided by IRP to Senate for information.

- **2023/24 Grades Report:**
  - This report is prepared once a year and it summarizes course grades at the University over a ten-year period. It is available on IRP's website: https://www.sfu.ca/irp/students/grades-report.html
  - The Grades Report has two parts: a PDF Summary Report (public), and a Tableau Dashboard with tables and charts of data (restricted to SFU faculty, staff, and senators).
  - At the September 2024 Senate meeting it was noted that the PDF report provided in prior years was more extensive (the longer PDF report has been replaced with the Tableau Dashboard).
  - To address this concern, a new tab, "Legacy Tables", has been added to the Tableau Dashboard. The new tab combines the information from all the faculties or all the subjects into a single table, to mirror the format of the tables that appeared in the retired (longer) PDF report. The Tableau Dashboard can be found here: https://tableau.sfu.ca/#/site/InstitutionalResearchandPlanning/views/GradesReport/Introduction, and is linked to from the main Grades Report page (link above).
  - If you are interested in attending a demo on how to use the Grades Report Tableau Dashboard (to see the data in tables and charts), please email askIRP@sfu.ca.

- **Effect of COVID/Grading Policies on Grades/Performance:**
  - At the September 2023 meeting of Senate, it was requested that IRP provide some data related to the preparedness of incoming undergraduate students in COVID vs. pre-COVID times, as well as the effect of various recent grading policies on undergraduate course grades. This report was prepared to meet that request, and was provided to Senate at the September 2024 meeting.
  - At the September 2024 Senate meeting, a request was made to include what the average course grades would have been without the changes to grading policy implemented in response to COVID.
  - The requested data has been added to Table 2 of the attached report.

If you have trouble accessing reports on IRP's website, please contact askIRP@sfu.ca.

Enclosure

Effect of COVID and Temporary Grading Policies
on Undergraduate Grades and Student Performance

At the September 2023 meeting of Senate, it was requested that IRP provide some data related to the preparedness of incoming students in COVID vs. pre-COVID times, as well as the effect of various recent grading policies on undergraduate course grades.

Table 1 displays the performance of incoming undergraduate admits from secondary schools in fall terms over the last 7 years. Years 2017-2019 are before COVID, and 2020-2023 are after COVID began. Three different SFU performance measures are included: Term 1 GPA, Retention to Year 2, and Retention to Year 3. Note that recently admitted students have not yet been followed long enough to produce all performance measures.

Table 1: Performance of Incoming Fall Admits from Secondary School

Admission Term	Number of Students	Average Term 1 GPA	Year 1 to Year 2 Retention Rate	Year 1 to Year 3 Retention Rate
Fall 2017	3,268	2.70	88%	81%
Fall 2018	3,448	2.72	88%	81%
Fall 2019	2,961	2.77	90%	83%
Fall 2020	3,073	2.84	89%	82%
Fall 2021	3,606	2.79	89%	---
Fall 2022	3,812	2.82	---	---
Fall 2023*	3,865	3.01	---	---

COVID →

* Note that Fall 2023 had a relatively generous grading policy in place in response to the TSSU strike, which accounts for the relatively high Term 1 GPA of incoming students that term.

The Average Term 1 GPA of recent incoming fall secondary admits has generally been slightly higher than the pre-COVID cohorts. To some extent (especially for the Fall 2023 admits), this can be attributed to grading policies in place after COVID started, which generally yielded higher average grades. However, the Fall 2020 admits were not affected by such a grading policy in their first term. Nearly all courses were taught remotely in Fall 2020, and it's possible this affected grading practices.

So far, it appears that retention rates have not decreased since COVID began, although there is currently limited follow-up data for those recent admission cohorts. Again, it's possible that retention rates are being bolstered by the recent grading policies that tend to yield higher average grades.

Table 2 displays undergraduate course grades data from 2017 to 2023, and splits the terms into different periods based on the grading policies that were in place.

Table 2: Course Grades Associated with Recent Grading Policies

Grading Period	Grading Policy	Average Course Grade	Avg Course Grade Ignoring Unusual Grading Policies	% P/CR/NC	% Fail Grades
1: 2017-2019	No Unusual Policy	2.88	2.88	0%	4%
2: Spring 2020	Spring 2020 COVID Policy	3.23	3.04	18%	2%
3: Summer - Fall 2020	No Unusual Policy, Remote Courses	3.01	3.01	0%	3%
4: Spring 2021 - Summer 2023	Elective Grade Policy	2.98	2.97	2%	4%
5: Fall 2023	Special Policy (TSSU Strike)	3.19	2.93	17%	4%

The average course grades have the expected pattern based on the grading policies in place during these periods:

- The first grading period (2017-2019) is pre-COVID, and had no special grading policies in place; it can be thought of as a baseline.
- Both Spring 2020 and Fall 2023 (the 2nd and 5th grading periods in the table) have high average course grades. These two terms had relatively generous grading policies in place, which allowed students to wait until they saw their final grade, and then decide whether they wished to switch their grade to the P/CR/NC scale[1]. They could make this switch in as many of their courses as they wished. P/CR/NC grades are not included in average course grade calculations, because these grades have no numeric value.
- The 3rd and 4th grading periods have average grades between the baseline and the higher average grades of Spring 2020/Fall 2023.
    - The 3rd period did not have any unusual grading policy in place. However, these were the first terms after the start of COVID, with no in-person teaching. It's possible that the move to remote classes had an effect on grading practices.
    - The 4th period had the Elective Grade Policy in place. This policy did allow students to switch grades to the P/CR/NC scale, which tended to push average grades upward. But the effect is less strong than in Spring 2020 and Fall 2023, because of the details of the policy: students had to make the decision to switch to P/CR/NC *before* seeing their final grade in the course, could only make this switch in a limited number of courses, and could not do so for required courses.

The "Avg Course Grade Ignoring Unusual Grading Policies" column displays an estimate of what the average course grade would have been in the absence of the COVID, Elective, and TSSU grading policies (estimate based on a student's first assigned grade in the course). In periods 1 and 3, no unusual policy was in place, so this column matches the "Average Course Grade" column.

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[1] or switch any passing grade to P in Spring 2020

The "% P/CR/NC" column displays the percentage of course grades that were switched to the P/CR/NC scale[2]. In periods 1 and 3, this is necessarily 0%, because the P/CR/NC grade scale was not available during those periods. The option to switch scales was most heavily used in Spring 2020[3] and Fall 2023, when students could apply this switch in as many courses as they wanted, and after seeing their final grade in the course.

The last column shows what percentage of undergraduate course grades were fail grades (F/FD/N/NC)[2]. This has been fairly stable over time. There was a decrease in 2020 with the move to remote courses at the start of COVID.

Table Notes and Definitions

Table 1:

1. For each year, the cohort consists of all new undergraduate students in the fall term, admitted on the basis of their secondary school results, who were in an undergraduate degree program in their first term (exchange, visiting and irregular students are excluded).
2. The year 1 to year 2 retention rate is the percentage of these students who either registered in an undergraduate degree program at SFU during year 2 (terms 4, 5 or 6 following admission), or graduated with an SFU undergraduate degree by the end of their second year (term 6 following admission; based on completion term, not convocation date).
3. The year 1 to year 3 retention rate is the percentage of these students who either registered in an undergraduate degree program at SFU during year 3 (terms 7, 8 or 9 following admission), or graduated with an SFU undergraduate degree by the end of their third year (term 9 following admission; based on completion term, not convocation date).
4. GPA data for the student's first term is as of March 7, 2024.
5. Registration data are taken at the official reporting date (generally end-of-week-3) each term.

Table 2:

1. The analysis includes grades with a numeric equivalent (A+ to F/FD/N) and P/CR/NC grades due to various recent grading policies (the Spring 2020 COVID grading policy, the Elective Grade Policy, and the Fall 2023 grading policy in response to the TSSU strike; i.e. – regular P grades are not included, only P grades associated with these recent grading policies). For Spring 2020 only, it was not always possible to differentiate regular P grades from P grades that resulted from the one-time grading policy, but this should have minimal effect on the P statistics.
2. Co-op courses are excluded from this table. Where they could be identified, courses graded as Pass/Fail are also excluded.
3. Average Grades only include grades with a numeric equivalent.
4. "Avg Course Grade Ignoring Unusual Grading Policies" estimates what the average course grade would have been in the absence of the unusual grading policies. For periods 4 and 5, students making use of the Elective/TSSU policies were flagged, and their original grade in the course (prior to the application of the policy) was used. In Spring 2020, these students were not flagged, and a "best guess" had to be made: original course grades were used in cases where the final grade was a P and the original grade was in the A+ to D range.

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[2] Note that the denominator here is P/CR/NC grades plus grades with a numeric equivalent: A+ to F/FD/N.
[3] Note that in Spring 2020, this percentage is an estimate, since the reason for a P grade was not recorded that term.

5.   Course grades data is as of November 15, 2024.

Source: AH-488