

Comments concerning proposed “IUB Policy BL-ACA xx Grades and Grading”

College of Arts and Sciences
Undergraduate Academic Affairs
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GENERAL COMMENTS

- It would be clearer if the lower levels indicated in “Principal Administrator” were removed, otherwise one has to speculate who the “Principal Administrator” is for a particular matter. In most cases the Principal Administrator for these matters is a designee of the appropriate school’s dean. Occasionally, these matters may be delegated to a chair or program director, but that would be covered under “that administrator’s designee(s).” Suggested language: “Principal administrator: The dean of a college or school or that administrator’s designee(s).”

A.1. Units with graduate or professional programs may adopt or modify any provisions, including grade submission deadlines, as appropriate to their programs.

- We are concerned about this provision, especially as it relates to Accelerated Master’s Degree (AMPs) and other undergraduate students taking graduate courses that may count toward an undergraduate degree program. Allowing for different grade deadlines means that academic standing review and graduation certification may not be able to take place on time. This can delay student graduation or cause disruption to review processes. It could also impact financial aid, student-athlete certification, scholarships eligibility, and other processes. The situation could be exacerbated if AMPs grow in popularity, which we understand to be a goal of the Provost.

C.1. “FN” should be assigned to a student who has failed a course because of unexcused absences from classes, labs, exams, or other activities. As specified in VPSS 10, Unofficial Withdrawal, when an FN is assigned, the instructor must indicate the last known date of class attendance and when an FN assigned in an online course, the instructor must indicate the last date of participation in an academic activity. When an “FN” has been assigned, an “F” will appear on the student’s transcript. The “N” and date of last attendance will be retained in the student’s record as an internal grade only.

- The opening statement is a significant departure from current policy, which states FN is for a student who attended class but stopped attending (and presumably did not resume attending). If the proposed new definition (excessive absences) is adopted, what date is supposed to be entered if a student for the “last known date of classes attendance” in a situation where student attended a Fall class in September, did not attend class in October and November, and then resumed attending in December?

- The original policy was written at a time when students generally had to be in class to submit assignments. What should be done for an in-person class where the student does not attend after the first month (or has excessive absences under the proposed new policy language) but does continue to submit assignments through Canvas? In some classes, instructors will penalize the student for the unexcused absences, result in an F even if the work submitted was A-level work. Is this an FN?

C.3.b. A student whose request for an Incomplete has been refused by the instructor may appeal using the unit’s grade appeal process.

- While we believe the provision as proposed is an improvement over the ACA-66 version of the policy, it remains unclear as to what exactly is supposed to happen through the grade appeal process or when appeals should occur.
- The College typically only allows grade appeals once a *final grade* has been officially recorded. As written, the provision would seem to allow a student who—to be somewhat extreme for the sake of example—requested and was denied an incomplete in the ninth week of class to access the appeal process. This could end up demanding considerable administrative and faculty resources.
- When a grade appeal is reviewed by the College, it moves forward to the Academic Fairness Committee only if there is a claim and evidence that the instructor treated the student differently from other students similarly situated in the class, graded on non-academic grounds, or graded in a way that was inconsistent from the syllabus or other instructions to the class. If the proposed provision stands, we will treat appeals concerning denied incomplete grades similarly.
- If an appeal for a denied incomplete is brought before the unit’s Academic Fairness Committee, what is the committee expected to do? In cases where the committee might disagree with the denied incomplete, is the expectation that the committee instructs the faculty member to come up with a plan to get the student caught up, evaluate the assignments, and issue a new grade—even if this was from barely a year ago?

C.3.f (sub-bullet 1). If the instructor, in consultation with the principal administrator of the unit offering the course, determines that it is not feasible for the student to complete the required work, the student may be *given the letter grade earned based on the work completed*. (emphasis added)

- Does “based on the work completed” mean that the final grade is calculated with zeroes entered for the missing assignments or that the missing assignments are removed as assignments altogether for the student? Our assumption is the latter is intended, but that raises concerns related to fairness to all the other students who had to complete the work, the assessment of learning, and students getting credit when they didn’t complete the course. We believe the inclusion of this provision assumes a particular set of circumstances but may fail to fully appreciate the full range of such circumstances. Remember that per C.3 of the policy, the instructor decides when an incomplete is to be awarded. There are no additional approvals required for this action. This means that a wide variety of circumstances lead instructors to award an incomplete and these go unregulated. A few additional points/examples to further illustrate:
 - Course X is graded as follows Exam 1 during week 9 (30%), Exam 2 (30%) week 12, Final Exam (40%) 16:
 - Student A has a death in the family and misses Exam 1. Instructor has the student take the exam the following week. Student earns

85/100 on Exam 1 makeup, 75/100 on Exam 2, and 70/100 on the Final Exam, for a final grade of C (76%). (The class average shows nearly all student performed worse on the final exam than they did on the first two exams.)

- Student B has a death in the family and misses the final exam. An incomplete is granted, and completion deadline agreed upon. Student becomes overwhelmed by keeping their grades up for law school applications, preparing for the LSAT, taking a full load of classes, working part-time, and finishing the incomplete in Course X (and also incompletes in Course Y and Course Z from last semester). Student claims hardship and instructor agrees it is not feasible to continue and that grade should be awarded based on what is completed. Student earned 85/100 on Exam 1, 75/100 on Exam 2. The Final Exam is not factored in, and the student earns a B- (80%) in the course—two gradations higher than Student A.
- Why did Student B get a special treatment that Student A, similarly situated, did not?
 - Depending on how a course is constructed, a significant portion of the work could come due at the end of the course. Why is it appropriate for a student not have to produce this work to demonstrate mastery of course material? The student will be able to move forward in subsequent courses and may not be prepared because they were not expected to all the work in the same way all other students were.
 - The appearance of a grade on transcript for a course implies that a student completed the course and met some level of expectations. The provision as proposed could undermine this assumption.
 - The comments for bullet 2, which concerns possible circumvention of the withdrawals were nicely addressed in the policy. Why create an entire new whole with this option?

C.3.g. For undergraduate students only: If an undergraduate student is not in attendance during the last several weeks of the term, the instructor is permitted to report a grade of “I” if there is reason to believe that the absence was beyond the student’s control; otherwise, the instructor shall record a grade of “FN.”

- This is not consistent with current policy, which states that this option is used when a student misses the final exam and there is reason to believe that extenuating circumstances may exist.
- If the proposed new text is adopted, some text should be added to indicate how and by when an instructor is supposed to determine whether the awarding of the incomplete was appropriate.

C.4.a. Students shall be allowed to replace the grade in any course unless the faculty of a unit decides that it will not allow its students to replace grades in courses required for a major, minor, certificate, honors program, or other recognition by the unit.

- This provision is problematic when a student is pursuing degrees in multiple schools. Which school “wins” and how is this expected to be coordinated? In our view, we should have a uniform policy. The College made significant changes to our policies a couple of years ago to conform to what the rest of campus was doing.

C.4.b. The “X” shall replace the original grade and be recorded on the student’s transcript for the term in which the course was taken the first time. The second grade shall be recorded on the transcript for the term in which the course was retaken. The terms do not have to be contiguous.

- The use of “first” and “second” in various instances of this policy is confusing to students, advisors, and recorders. We recommend “earlier” and “subsequent.”
- Example:
 - Student X has earned the following grades:
 - CHEM-C 117, 3 cr. (Fall 2022) D
 - CHEM-C 117, 3 cr. (Spring 2023) F
 - CHEM-C 117, 3 cr. (Spring 2024) C-
 - Student may wish to use EX on the Spring 2023, but that is the second time the student took the course. We would allow this under current practice, but the language proposed sows confusion.
 - Depending on what is enacted in C.4.j, it might be possible for the student to use EX on the Fall 2022 enrollment in combination with the subsequent Spring 2023 enrollment AND then again on the Spring 2023 enrollment in combination with the subsequent Spring 2024 enrollment

C.4.c The student is required to obtain consent to replace a grade from of the principal administrator of the student’s unit prior to the student’s graduation.

- The “prior to graduation” languages has been problematic since it was added to the policy over a decade ago. Does this mean:
 - Prior to the commencement ceremony? (There isn’t a ceremony for all graduation terms.)
 - Prior to the conferral date of the degree? (In recent years, there were final exams taking place on or after this date—adding all kinds of confusion.)
 - Prior to the date the unit verifies that a student has earned a grade? This occurs 2-3 weeks after the end of the term.)
- We recommend that an official date be established for this purpose and added to the official academic calendar. Something like “Last day to file a Grade Replacement petition for students graduating Spring 2025.” This date would be set by the Registrar and all units can link to the date in the official calendar.
 - “Extended-X” is the term currently used. If this policy moves us away from that terminology, that needs to be foregrounded, as many school policies, forms, and websites will need to be updated.
- The language of this provision can then be changed to something like “The student is required to obtain consent to replace a grade from of the principal administrator of the student’s unit prior to graduation and by the deadline established by the registrar.”

C.4.d The grade replacement option may not be exercised if the original grade was assigned as a result of the student’s academic misconduct.

- As written, this is in conflict other policy (C10). Grade replacement can still be used in circumstances when an instructor assigns a specific letter grade for misconduct. It is only when the instructor imposed a sanction that the grade cannot be replaced (an asterisk added to the grade) that this restriction applies.
- The provision should instead be something like the following: “The grade replacement option may not be exercised if the student committed academic

misconduct in the course where the original grade was earned, and the instructor imposed a sanction to disallow grade replacement. This is indicated by an asterisk (*) following the letter grade on the internal grade record.

C.4.h. A student must receive a letter grade upon retake in order to change the previous grade to an “X.” The previous grade remains on the transcript if the student receives a “W,” “I” or “NC” in the retaken course.

- Can a student who earned an F in a course with an S/F grading basis use Grade Replacement? Current practice is they can, but it is not clear in the policy.
- How about in cases where the first time the course was S/F and the second time it was A-F or vice versa? In other words, does the grading basis need to be the same each time?
- How does Pass/Fail play into this?

C.4.i. The course that the student retakes must be the same course as the previous one, or its equivalent, but need not be offered by the same instructor. The principal administrator of the unit offering the original course shall determine whether there is course equivalency.

- The term “equivalent” is a vexed term at IU. It would be ideal to avoid that term in this policy if possible. Something like: “The course that the student retakes must be the same course as the previous one but need not be offered by the same instructor. In cases where a course number changes or the student subsequently takes a graduate or honors version of the original course, the principal administrator of the unit offering the original course shall determine whether grade replacement can be applied in these cases.”
- Also, the current Extended-X procedures directly address variable title courses. Might it make sense to also include language to this effect? Revising the above suggested language: “The course that the student retakes must be the same course as the previous one but need not be offered by the same instructor. For variable title courses, the topic retaken must also be the same. In cases where a course number changes or the student subsequently takes a graduate or honors version of the original course, the principal administrator of the unit offering the original course shall determine whether grade replacement can be applied in these cases.”

C.4.j A student may exercise the grade replacement option for the same course more than once, but each replacement counts toward the maximum courses or credit hours allowed.

- We are not opposed to the above language, but it is a significant departure from current policy and many students who have requested this in the past had their requests denied. These students may have subsequently gone on to use grade replacement on other courses—some of which may have been less favorable to them. To make the change a little fairer to all students (it can never be completely fair), perhaps the provision should be amended to say something like “When a student seeks to use grade replacement for a second or third time on a course, both courses must have been taken Fall 2024 [or Spring 2025] or later.” This way, no student can use it a second or third time on a single course if the subsequent course was taken prior to the change.

C.4. Additional comment: Is the intention to replace all the Extended-X policies? If so, what about the following provisions that are not lost:

- Can be used on Fall 2001 and later courses only. (There are students who came back from Summer 2001 and earlier.)
- A student may not request reversal after asking for and applying the GPA exclusion.

5 R (deferred). An “R” should be assigned at the end of the first term of a multi-term course, thesis, or research project, to indicate that a letter grade cannot be assigned until all required work has been completed. When all required work has been completed, the instructor shall submit a letter grade covering all terms that will replace the “R” on the student’s transcript. If a student withdraws during a term of the course, the instructor shall enter a letter grade for the completed terms if feasible, and a “W” for the withdrawn term.

- This provision is not well formulated in ACA-66 or in this proposal.
- “R” grades have traditionally been used for research courses where the research or writing associated with it will extend beyond the boundary of term of enrollment. It acts like an incomplete, but one that does not convert to an F after one year (sometimes the research goes on for years). The enrollment can just be for a single term, but not completed until 3 or 4 (or more terms later). It therefore is not a “multi-term course.” At the undergraduate level, this is the most common usage of the R grade.
- There are circumstances where students enroll in Course A in Term X, enrolls in Course B in Term Y, with Courses A and B being linked. An R grade is assigned in Course A until the completion of the work associated with both courses is completed. Usually, the grade for Course B is assigned through the regular grade roster submission process at the end of term/session and the grade for Course A is assigned through the grade change process.
- As proposed, it implies instructors have authority to issue W grades (for the current term or retroactively). They do not and granting the authority here seems to conflict with other provisions of the proposed policy.

C.6.c S (Satisfactory). General comments:

- The “author” of the proposed document seems to question the difference between Pass/Fail and Satisfactory/Fail. There is plenty of confusion about it and we don’t believe the proposed policy brings any clarity to the matter.
- Pass/Fail has always been a grading basis an individual student can elect for an course when allowed by the unit and requested by the campus deadline. Only A-F (regular grading basis) courses are eligible for conversion to P/F. Instructors still award the A-F grade earned, but if the final grade is D- or higher the Registrar converts the final grade to P. Instructors are not supposed to know whether a student is taking a class P/F.
- Satisfactory/Fail is an original grading basis applied to all students in the course. There has been plenty of debate of the years about which A-F grade equates to “Satisfactory.” Absent policy on the matter, the College has consistently held that at the undergraduate level “Satisfactory” is calibrated to D- or higher. Here’s why:
 - Satisfactory does not carry a GPA value. It is GPA neutral. The F grade, however, is not.

- If Satisfactory were calibrated to C or C-, a student earning any D grade (or a C- in the case of C calibration) would have that grade essentially converted to an F. That seems unfair.
- Furthermore, a student cannot elect to convert an S/F course to P/F. Since S/F is traditionally used for courses where there is not sufficient academic work being done to warrant regular grading, it is difficult to square the stakes for S/F grading being higher than for A-F grading.
- Many of us have the view that P/F grading basis is fine, but S/F should be Satisfactory/No Credit. Satisfactory being defined as the equivalent of a C (or C-) and No Credit providing no credit to the student but, like the S grade, having neutral value in the GPA. This would resolve the tensions mentioned above and make IU's grading system better align with our peer institutions.

7.a. Withdrawal from a class can have consequences such as for financial aid and visas.

- It seems strange to have a reminder like this as a provision in a policy. Also, other grades also have consequences (I grades, F grades, etc.).

7.b. The permanent record will not show withdrawals made during the period of Drop and Add. An exception to this rule occurs when a student withdraws from the University, in which case W's are automatically recorded by the Registrar.

- “Drop and Add” is not a defined term in this policy. Colloquial use would imply that range of dates to which this provision applies is quite large since students can “drop” and “add” courses well into the semester.
- We don't believe the exception is true. Is this a proposed change?

7.c.2. If a student withdraws after the automatic withdrawal period but for a reason and within a time limit set by a unit under a unit policy that allows such withdrawals, with the consent of the instructor and principal administrator of the student's unit.

- This provision is difficult to parse as proposed. Extenuating circumstances or similar language should be added back in.
- Isn't the “time limit” (deadline) set by campus? It was in the past, though it seems to be missing from the Academic Calendar in recent years.
- Instructors have never been asked to “approve” a Late Withdrawal and ordinarily they would have insufficient information to do so (medical documentation, etc.). What instructors have been asked to do, per existing policy, is indicate whether at the time of withdrawal the student is passing the course. Many instructors do not adhere to this policy, however, and this has created an inequity for our students. We recommend that the instructor be removed from the Late Withdrawal process altogether.

C.10 [Grade]* (academic misconduct).

- We believe the proposed revision in the comment is the better construction of this provision:
 - [Grade]* (academic misconduct). An asterisk may be appended to any letter grade to indicate that the grade was given as a result of a student's academic misconduct, if originally assigned as one of the sanctions on the Academic Misconduct Report filed by the instructor. If a misconduct investigation is

underway that might impact the student's grade, the student should receive an "I*." Only the letter grade will appear on the student's transcript. A grade with an asterisk may not be replaced with an "X."

D.1 1. At the end of a term, the instructor shall submit grades for all students enrolled in the course in a form and under procedures established by the campus registrar.

- Recommend simplifying to: At the end of a term, the instructor shall submit grades for all students enrolled in the course in ~~a form and under~~ *accordance with* the procedures established by the campus registrar.

D4. Grades shall be submitted to, recorded, and maintained by the campus registrar. Individual academic units may also maintain grade records.

- It is unclear what is intended with "Individual academic units may also maintain grade records."

F. Academic Distinction

- The 10% rule is a problematic in that it means the threshold for achieving distinction shifts with each graduating class. For instance, the cutoff would have been 3.899 for Fall 2024 graduates; 3.771 for Summer 2024, and 3.936 for Spring 2024 graduates. It is unfair to have such a wide discrepancy based on the graduation term.
- The College's practice has been set distinction based on GPA and to award distinction to all students who meet the thresholds.
- It is also important to remember that we report a tentative distinction so that it can be included in the commencement program. It seems problematic to have a student go through graduation and their parents see their name in the program with a level of distinction only to later be told that, even though your child raised their GPA in their last semester and we tentatively said they had distinction, they ended up missing the 10% cutoff so they don't get to earn it.
- Provision 2 seems to conflict with Provision 1, as units would need to have sliding scale or recalibrate the minima with each class.
- We recommend provisions 1 and 2 be combined and written something like: "There are three levels of distinction: distinction, high distinction, and highest distinction. To graduate with academic distinction, students must meet the GPA requirement set by their respective academic unit and complete at a minimum of 60 hours at Indiana University."