**Motion re: Change in Grading System**

**Referred by the Curriculum Committee**

**Motion:**

Radford University should adopt a plus/minus grading system for undergraduate programs to become effective Summer 2013.

**Rationale:**

In 2009, Faculty Senate passed a motion providing a plus/minus grading system for graduate programs but declined to apply it to undergraduate courses. But because there are strong proponents for this system at the undergraduate level, we chose to bring this to Senate again.

As this issue was discussed at Senate so recently, the committee investigated the validity of concerns as listed in the minutes of the 2009 meeting:

1. CONCERN: Plus/minus system could negatively impact students’ grade point averages. EVIDENCE: This has been studied quite thoroughly, and the consensus is that the pluses and minuses cancel each other out, leaving the students’ aggregate GPAs virtually the same. (Baker & Bates, 1999; Dixon 2004; Eastern Kentucky University Study, 2003; Barnes & Buring, 2012, Matthew, 1997). The research studies also indicate that the perception of a majority of students and faculty is that a plus/minus system would be detrimental to GPAs (Barnes & Buring, 2012; Baker & Bates, 1999).
2. CONCERN: Grade appeals will increase.

EVIDENCE: The available research has focused on faculty perceptions that grade appeals would increase but we were unable to find published literature that charted and compared the number of grade appeals before and after a plus/minus system was implemented. The registrar at Georgia State reported that the number of appeals increased after implementation, but was unsure as to whether how much was due to student grievance appeals versus mistakes needing correction because of a new tool to enter grades (“Against the Adoption of the Plus/Minus Grading System at CSU Long Beach”).

Faculty in favor of implementing a plus/minus grading system at Radford University would like a way to more finely distinguish between students. Students and faculty alike have lamented the fact that, for example, a student who earns 80 percent of the points possible in a given course will typically receive the same grade as another student who earns 89 percent of the points in the same course. Once again turning to the research, we see that some faculty want to be able to make such distinctions, but others feel that there is no need for more detailed grading (Eastern Kentucky University Study, 2003).

Another argument in favor of plus/minus grading is that it will encourage student motivation. Students in general fear the plus/minus system (although many are in favor of a plus only system), and when surveyed as to whether such a system would increase their motivation , they say no. But in follow up questions asking whether they would work harder to try to get a B+, the majority say they would (Barnes & Buring, 2012; Frank & Feeney, 2006; Dixon 2004).

In an examination of grading systems of universities that are considered Radford University’s peer institutions and Virginia public universities, we find that the majority have available a plus/minus system comparable to the one proposed.

The available evidence shows that plus/minus grading systems are controversial (Morgan, 2007), but those who use it of their own volition find it beneficial (Barnes & Buring, 2012; Bressette, 2002). For this reason, the committee supports adding plus/minus as an option for faculty to use. If this motion passes, no faculty member would be forced to give plus/minus grades, although it would certainly be recommended that faculty clearly indicate whether they award pluses and minuses to students in the syllabus.

Catalog Revisions

Current:

A=4points

B=3 points

C=2points

D=1 point

F=0 points

Recommended Revision:

The “top” grade should remain an A, so students who achieve excellence would receive 4 points in their GPA, whether or not the professor awards pluses.

A=4 points

A-=3.7 points

B+=3.3 points

B=3.0 points

B-=2.7 points

C+=2.3 points

C=2.0 points

C-=1.7 points

D= 1 point

F=0 points

References

Against the adoption of the plus/minus grading system (n.a.) Retrieved from http://www.petitiononline.com/grading/petition.html

Baker, H. E., & Bates, H. L. (1999). Student and faculty perceptions of the impact of plus/minus grading: A management department perspectives. *Journal on Excellence in College Teaching, 10*(1), 23-33.

Barnes, K. D., & Buring, S. M. (2012). The effect of various grading scales on student grade point averages. *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education, 76*(3), 41.

Bressette, A. (2002). Arguments for plus/minus grading: A case study. *Educational Research Quarterly, 25*(3), 29-42.

Dixon, C. (2004). Plus/minus grading: If given a choice. *College Student Journal, 38*(2), 280.

Frank, M. L, & Feeney, L. (2006). Plus/minus grading: A within instructor comparison. *College Student Journal, 40*(4), 852-857.

Eastern Kentucky University Study: Ad Hoc Committee on Plus/Minus Grading 2002-2003. (2003). Retrieved from Eastern Kentucky University: <http://www.eku.edu/academics/facultysenate/minutes/2003-04/11-03-03/plus_minus_report/final.pdf>

Morgan, J, Tallman, G, & Williams, R. (2007) Student faculty view of plus-minus grading systems. Retrieved from Northern Arizona: <http://gondor.bus.cba.nau.edu/Faculty/Intellectual/workingpapers/pdf/Morgan_Plus-minus.pdf>