



# Faculty Senate Archives

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Faculty Senate

Academic year 2007-2008

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## Volume XXI

### Agenda and Minutes of the Meeting of February 11, 2008

**WICHITA STATE UNIVERSITY**  
**FACULTY SENATE**  
**AGENDA**

<b>MEETING NOTICE</b>	<b>Monday, February 11, 2008</b>
	<b>CH 107 3:30 p.m.</b>

**ORDER OF BUSINESS:**

- I. Call of the Meeting to Order**
  
- II. Informal Statements and Proposals**
  
- III. Approval of the Minutes**
  
- IV President's Report:**
  
- V Committee Reports:**
  - A. Rules --- Larry Spurgeon, chair**
  
- VI Old Business:**
  
- VII New Business:**
  - A. Motion from the Executive Committee:**
    - MOVED: That the WSU Faculty Senate adopt the following policy for grading and include the following language in the WSU Undergraduate Catalog, Graduate Bulletin, and all other relevant documents. *(If passed,***

*this motion will be brought to the General Faculty for a final vote. If passed by the General Faculty, the new policy will take effect as quickly as the required changes to the university computer system can be made.)*

**The grading system at WSU is**

<b>grade</b>	<b>points per credit hour</b>	
<b>A</b>	<b>4.00</b>	<b>The A range</b>
<b>denotes <u>excellent</u> performance.</b>		
<b>A-</b>	<b>3.67</b>	
<b>B+</b>	<b>3.33</b>	
<b>B</b>	<b>3.00</b>	<b>The B range denotes <u>good</u> performance.</b>
<b>B-</b>	<b>2.67</b>	
<b>C+</b>	<b>2.33</b>	
<b>C</b>	<b>2.00</b>	<b>The C range</b>
<b>denotes <u>satisfactory</u> performance.</b>		
<b>C-</b>	<b>1.67</b>	
<b>D+</b>	<b>1.33</b>	
<b>D</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>The D range</b>
<b>denotes <u>unsatisfactory</u> performance.</b>		
<b>D-</b>	<b>0.67</b>	
<b>F</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>F denotes <u>failing</u> performance.</b>

**{Definitions for the grades below to remain the same as p. 34f of the Undergraduate Catalog}**

<b>Au</b>	<b>Audit</b>
<b>Cr</b>	<b>Credit</b>
<b>NCr</b>	<b>No credit</b>
<b>S</b>	<b>Satisfactory</b>
<b>U</b>	<b>Unsatisfactory</b>
<b>I</b>	<b>Incomplete</b>
<b>W</b>	<b>Withdrawn</b>
<b>CrE</b>	<b>Credit by examination</b>

Rationale: <http://webs.wichita.edu/senate/Plus-Minusgrade-EC%20discussions.htm>

<http://webs.wichita.edu/senate/Plus-Minusgrade.htm>

**VIII As May Arise**

## EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

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### ***Arguments For Plus/Minus Grading***

1. *Fairness.* It is unfair to reward students equally when there are large disparities in their accomplishments, particularly in the B range. Under the current system both a student with an 89% and a student with an 80% in a class have a 3.0 GPA. Under the Plus/Minus system, the former would have a 3.33 GPA and the latter would have a 2.67 GPA. It is simply fairer to the students who work harder and is a more accurate reflection of performance.

2. *Engagement.* The current system provides a disincentive to students to stay engaged during the last part of the semester. Attendance lags in part because some students believe they cannot raise their final grades. The energy level in the classroom suffers as a result. A plus/minus system provides an incentive for students to maintain effort through finals to incrementally increase GPA, or at the very least, provides a disincentive to avoid a decrease in GPA.

3. *Adding Value for Grad School Applications.* Though the evidence is mostly anecdotal, there is a perception that some graduate schools view a 4.0 in a Plus/Minus system more favorably than a 4.0 at a traditional ABCDF school.

4. *Other Universities.* 19 of the top 20 U.S. News & World Report schools use Plus/Minus. Approximately 80% of “Carnegie-classified research universities” have it. In the regent’s system, Emporia State and KU have it (although KU leaves it up to the colleges).

### ***Arguments Against Plus/Minus Grading***

1. *Impact on Overall GPA.* There is a perception that cumulative GPA will be significantly affected. Some studies indicate the overall impact on GPA for the university is insignificant.

2. *“A” Students.* Students with a high GPA will be concerned that the GPA will drop. For students with a 4.0 that is likely. But other students will find that the occasional B they now receive will sometimes be a B+, which will help offset the A-.

3. *Students May Fall into Academic Probation.* It is true that some students who now meet the minimum grade qualifications will go on probation (although logically, some of them will actually try harder to move to the higher threshold). And what is wrong with providing a stronger incentive to do better?

### *Other Issues to Consider*

*Optional or Mandatory?* This is one of the most controversial, and most important, issues to consider. The Executive Committee recommends that if Plus/Minus grading is adopted, that it be required across the university.

#### *Graduate vs. Undergraduate*

*Which point system should be used?* There are several variations on the actual point values, and some schools use D+ while others do not, and a few have an A+. We recommend the following: 4.0 for A: 3.67 for A-: 3.33 for B+: 3.0 for B: 2.67 for B-: 2.33 for C+: 2.0 for C: 1.67 for D+.

#### *How should this system be phased in?*

## **Rationale from Executive Committee discussions:**

### **RATIONALE**

- 1. This system gives faculty tools to make appropriate distinctions between levels of student performance and to reward student performance in a more nuanced way. E.g., faculty will no longer have to lump together students who earn 89 with those who earn 81.**
- 2. Plus-minus grading allows faculty to give more precise and thus more informative feedback to students, which is better for learning and for motivation. It is also more fair to students, both individually and collectively.**
- 3. Plus-minus grading provides motivation and incentive for students to perform at a higher level. This is consistent with the desire to increase standards at WSU. Students who are earning a C- will now have to work that little bit harder to achieve a C and maintain their status. Students on the border between grade subdivisions will have a reason to keep trying at the end of semester. Students who might have told themselves, "I'll never get an A, why bother trying," might now work harder to achieve a B+ instead of being satisfied with a B.**
- 4. It will now be somewhat more difficult to achieve a 4.0 grade point average. Again, this is consistent with the desire to raise standards at WSU. Achieving a 4.0 will now really mean something and will be a valuable mark of distinction for our very best students.**
- 5. Plus-minus grading aligns more closely than the traditional system with how faculty actually grade students: Many (if not most) faculty actually assign percentage grades on assignments and use them to calculate the overall course grade as a percentage, which is then converted to a letter grade at the end of semester. That is, many of us already do distinguish between B+ (89%) and B- (81%), we just have not been allowed to express this distinction when submitting grades in the old system. This means that many (if not most) faculty will need to make few if any adjustments to their grading practices in order to work within the plus-minus system.**
- 6. A majority of US colleges use plus-minus grading; 80% of Carnegie-classified schools use plus-minus grading; 19 of the top 20 US universities use plus-minus grading; two other members of the Kansas Regents system use plus-minus grading. (The version of plus-minus grading proposed above is by far the most common one, with the addition of D+ and D-.)**

## ISSUES TO CONSIDER

1. Studies show that the institution-wide average GPA is unaffected by a switch to a plus-minus grading system. Only a few studies have been conducted on the effect of plus-minus grading on overall grade distributions; they have found that there is essentially no change.
2. According to a computer model developed at Wake Forrest, the expected change in individual GPA due to a change of grading systems is +/-0.06. It should be noted that students near the top of the range are affected most—e.g., students with a 3.9 GPA can see a decrease of as much as 0.08.
3. Students who earn C- can be subject to difficulties they would have avoided in a “straight” letter grading system. The first option is to bite this bullet, using it to raise standards at WSU and to inspire students to work harder. After all, the point of regulations regarding maintaining a C average is not to encourage or make it possible for students to “just scrape by” with a 1.67 GPA. The second option is to re-write the various policies related to maintaining a C average so that any grade in the C range, including C-, counts as meeting the minimum standard. (The easiest way to do that might be to insert something like the following in the relevant places: “In this policy, ‘C’ should be interpreted to refer to any grade in the C range, from C- to C+.”)
4. There might be more grade appeals; under the new system some students who earn minus grades (especially C- and A-) might appeal for the full letter, for example. An increased number of appeals, although likely based on experiences at other colleges, is not by itself a weighty enough reason to not implement plus-minus grading. The positive reasons in favor of the system outweigh such practical concerns, which can in any case be ameliorated by developing appropriate administrative structures. Note that finding a way to deal with extra appeals is something that the Senate can consider AFTER the new system is implemented, IF it turns out that there really are additional appeals. (We could, for example, bar appeals of half a letter grade or less, or we could increase the size of the Committee that handles appeals and run parallel hearings instead of having one committee handle all the appeals, etc.)
5. Some have complained that introducing a plus-minus grading system forces faculty to assign grades in a certain way, thus impinging on academic freedom. Note, however, that the grading system we have now is similarly mandatory: A, B, C, D, and F. It is true that the new system adds several more categories, but that is not a

**change in the nature of the grading system relative to the faculty member's freedom to assign grades. The faculty member's discretion to establish his or her own methodology for assigning grades within the university-wide system remains as it was in the old system.**

- 6. A slow transition to a plus-minus system would only allow time for resentment, objections and confusion to build up. After a careful information campaign in which the Senate Executive together with Senators and administration explain the reasons for the change, the new system should be implemented as quickly as the computer system, Catalog and Bulletin can be changed, with no grand-fathering of students who began at WSU on the old system. A notation should be included on transcripts regarding the date of implementation of the new grading system.**
- 7. The students who benefit most from the plus-minus grading system are the best and hardest working students. These are exactly the students we should be rewarding. (The new system will make 4.0 a truly distinguished achievement and our A students will be distinguished from our A- students. (One might respond that our "pretty good" students will be harmed by the new system: where they would have gotten 4.0 in the old system, they will get 3.9 or 3.8 in the new. This is probably an acceptable consequence, since truth is better than fiction.) The system will also clearly benefit our hardest working students, who will have the opportunity to be rewarded where they would not have been in the old system--for example, by earning a B+ when someone else of similar ability but lesser habits would earn a B or B-.**
- 8. Making the system optional (where individual students, professors or colleges can opt in or out of plus-minus grading) has been tried in various places. The freedom and choice thereby gained seems to be counter-balanced by the inconsistency and unfairness of the "mixed" system that results.**

## **Wichita State University Faculty Senate meeting Monday, February 11, 2008**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Bolin, Brooks, Byrum, Carruthers, Close, Decker, deSilva, Gordon, Hager, Hamdeh, Hemans, Jarnagin, Klunder, Lancaster, Liera-Schwichtenberg, Miller, P. Moore-Jansen, Myers, Myose, Rillema, Riordan, Rokosz, Ross, Roussel, Russell, Smith-Campbell, Spurgeon, Taher, Thibeault, Turk, Uhing, Vanderburgh, Yildirim

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** Craig-Morland, Duncan, Hershfield, C. Moore-Jansen, Ravi, Yeager

**MEMBERS EXCUSED:** Campbell, Celestin, Coufal, Forlaw, Scherz, Schneegurt

**EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS:** Provost Miller

### **Summary of Action:**

#### **1. Accepted the appointment of Lop-Hing Ho to replace Acker**

**I. Call of the Meeting to Order:** The meeting was called to order by President Carruthers at 3:30 pm

#### **II. Informal Statements and Proposals:**

Senator Lancaster reminded the Senate that baseball season begins February 22.

President Carruthers is attempting to convince the administration to close the university whenever USD 259 is closed due to weather. Several senators mentioned this might cause problems especially with clinical courses and suggested that Faculty make their own call.

#### **III. Approval of the Minutes:**

#### **IV. President's Report:**

President Carruthers announced that Larry Spurgeon is now on the crisis management planning task force. She gave an update on cell phone policy reporting that the matter is not resolved. The Senate voted to table the issue. She mentioned that in future meetings, Mary Herron (April 9) will present a budget report; Elizabeth King, Foundation update and that HR will explain changes to spread of pay to align with tax code.

At the KBOR meeting coming up, the agenda includes discussion of caps on increases to tuition and other methods of limiting increasing costs to students; COFSP will discuss the 150-day academic year.

President Carruthers was asked by a faculty member to have the Senate consider a No Smoking ban within 25 feet of buildings. It was decided to wait until the State makes its recommendations.

She also informed the Senators that Senate election process will begin soon and that it will be conducted Electronically.

The Budget and Planning committee is meeting.

#### **V. Committee Reports:**

**A. Rules:** **Larry Spurgeon** presented the name of Lop-Hing Ho to complete the term vacated by Acker --- accepted

He then presented the name of Edwin Sawan to fill engineering seat vacated by Skinner. There was some discussion if Prof. Sawan was 1.0eft. The matter will be investigated.

#### **VI. Old Business:**

**A. +/- grading proposal -- President Carruthers** presented a motion from the Executive Committee proposing a +/- grading system for WSU. She reported that she met with the Graduate Council and they seemed favorable to the idea. They meet 2/22 and she hopes they will endorse the proposal. Much discussion followed from the senators regarding the pros/cons of the proposal. It was suggested that each Senator visit with their departments and bring those discussions to the next meeting. <http://webs.wichita.edu/senate/grading-plus-minus.htm>

#### **VII. New Business:**

**A. Electronic Elections -- Secretary Vanderburgh** displayed how the electronic election process will be performed. Nominations for Senator -at-Large positions will begin Monday, 2/18. He encouraged senators to inform their departments about this change and participate in the election process.

#### **VIII: As May Arise:**

The meeting was adjourned at 5:00 pm

Respectfully Submitted,  
William Vanderburgh, Secretary