

Winthrop University—Academic Council

Friday, August 28, 2020, 2:00pm

Virtual Meeting via Microsoft Teams

Kelly	Costner	COE
Kristen	Abernathy	CAS
Kori	Bloomquist	CAS
DeAnn	Brame	Library
Alice	Burmeister	CVPA
Erin	Hamel	COE
Jessie	Hamm*+	CAS
Matthew	Hayes	CAS
Dustin	Hoffman	CAS
Alice	McLaine	COE
Wendy	Sellers	CAS
Danko	Tarabar	CBA
Jason	Tselentis	CVPA
Jesse	Weser	CVPA
Michael	Whitney	CBA
Gina	Jones	Rec and Reg
Brandon	Jackson	Student

+Has 2:00 Friday class *Absent

Guests: Tim Druke, Adrienne McCormick, Adolphus Belk, Zach Abernathy

I. Welcome and New Member Introduction—Kelly Costner, Chair

Kori Bloomquist (CAS)

Jessie Hamm (CAS)

Jesse Weser (CVPA)

Brandon Jackson (CSL)

Two vacancies remain: one to be appointed by the President upon recommendation by VPAA; one to be elected from COE to complete the remaining two years of a term.

II. Charge by Faculty Conference (established by vote on Fri 08/21/2020)

We move that Academic Council be tasked with taking a close look at the modified grading system instituted late in Spring 2020 and continued into Fall 2020 to address the following:

A. What was the **impact** of the modified grading system in Spring 2020? This might include looking at data on the number of CR grades given, the percent of students opting for the SU option, the overall campus GPA compared to a “typical” spring semester.

B. What are **other institutions** doing in terms of modified grading systems and what is the timing of these?

- C. What were the **challenges** that our **faculty encountered** as a result of this modified grading system?
- D. Based on 1-3, please allow the entire faculty to take a vote on extensions to the modified grading system.

Dr. McCormick spoke to how Academic Affairs might work with the Council on this. She announced that Dr. Zach Abernathy is in a new role in AAAS. He will use predictive analytics in areas that can help us be more successful in our student support work. Dr. McCormick received some early data at the beginning of the summer from Mr. Drueke and Ms. Jones to help make decisions in the most unusual circumstances.

Dr. Abernathy remarked that he was happy to be a liaison and coordinate with Mr. Drueke and Ms. Jones. He is best equipped to help with the first item in the list of charges (A).

III. **We have no business on which to vote, but we will take this opportunity to**

- A. Discuss with Academic Affairs and Records and Registration the **types of data** already available and/or obtainable that might be useful in our pursuit of these questions, especially the impact of the modified grading system in Spring 2020.
- B. Consider **sources** and ways we might approach **data collection** for B and C above.
- C. Explore any **other possible questions** related to the charge (ex: any student challenges?) and
- D. Establish some **distributed duties** amongst ourselves in pursuit of these data.

Mr. Tim Drueke went over the raw grade data from spring. (see Appendix A) Grades wound up as expected.

Dr. Costner asked, "What does this say to us so far?"

Mr. Drueke said these grades were what he expected. We did not have a significant number of Ds or Fs. This means students and faculty stepped up—finished the semester as best as they could. Dr. Costner agreed. What we don't know is how many students used all S/Us.

Ms Jones was able to pull up that data--42.

Mr. Hayes asked, "What we were worried about? Where was the question coming from?"

Mr. Drueke stated that he thought there were two questions needing answered by some faculty:

1. under whose authority did this happen, and
2. was it the right thing to do for our students?

Dr. Belk mentioned students keeping LIFE scholarship. Mr. Drueke indicated there were a few students who petitioned to do some retroactive S/Us.

Dr. Belk stated he was surprised by the discussion at Faculty Conference. He thought there was concern about academic rigor, quality and standards, and if there was focus being put on how many students were gaming the system then we don't see the problem manifesting itself. In the space of a week, students had to rapidly vacate campus, go home to possibly unsafe environments, and continue on in their studies. We told faculty, put everything in remote learning. We dropped a ton of stress on people. Rather than looking at who's trying to game the system, we should be asking how can we help our

students. He is glad we extended the grading policy into the fall semester. He thought analysis by the committee will help alleviate concerns.

Dr. Hoffman noted the 1% increase in F and U vs. UN grades (more UN grades than there were F/U from previous spring). Mr. Druke mentioned it was really less than a 1 % increase.

Dr. McLaine spoke to academic rigor in regards to admission standards into programs (i.e. Athletic Training). She did not know if this was a concern.

Mr. Druke noted that the CR was equivalent to D's and if that's not allowed in a program then the CR is not allowed.

Dr. McLaine said it took care of the grade requirement but it was more of a GPA issue.

Dr. Belk stated that some of the same issues were being raised by faculty last spring but we still went forward with it and added that Dr. McLaine's concern was legitimate. He asked, "Are students advancing in programs because they are getting in with special circumstances? Are they being set up to fail?" The CR grade was to protect the GPA not determine whether it was sufficient to progress in programs that we heard Dr. McLaine spell out.

Mr. Druke noted that from the DegreeWorks standpoint, CRs were coded as Ds. Ms. Jones affirmed and said that a program that did not allow a D would have that course kicked out of the major.

Ms. Jesse Weser stated this was an issue in Design, except that their requirement was C+ in major. AS a result of the modified grading system in spring, the department is having to allow courses with an S/U.

Mr. Druke said we should encourage students to talk with advisors and instructors.

Ms. Jones reminded the council that, unlie spring, students cannot elect all S/Us this semester. Only one is allowed except for first-semester freshmen who can elect two.

Dr. Belk asked how many students took all S/Us in the spring. Ms. Jones indicated 42 out of 4200—about 1 %. [Correction 41 out of 4107 UG degree-seeking. One student was non-degree. This is still right at 1%]
Dr. Belk said this is what he was talking about in regards to "gaming the system."

Dr. Tarabar asked if there was conversation about continuing this grading policy and whether we got any student input.

Dr. Costner remarked that before we get into that, what about summer?

Mr. Druke said officially, we kept regular grading.

Dr. Costner asked what the reasoning was for going back. He assumed summer was regular grading because it was known that it would be all online from the beginning, and with fall, we still don't know what's going to happen.

Ms., Jones confirmed that this was the reasoning behind the summer policy.

Dr. Tarabar agreed with Dr. Belk that this seemed necessary. We need to give special warning to students about the grading.

Mr. Jason Tselentis stated that with regard March-May, there was an extremely complicated rubric—faculty had to digest that. He asked why we did not give everyone the S/U and then let students ask for the grade. He's asking this because he thinks we should reduce the number of choices students have to make.

Dr. Costner said that was the original proposal. The idea of CR came from a faculty member, but it grew into something else. It was an effort to help students at the positive end of the grading scale to benefit from what they were able to accomplish at that time, whereas the S would not contribute to the GPA.

Mr. Tselentis remarked that the GPA is important for students going to Graduate School and students who are grade conscious, and he did not want to diminish this, but asked, "How do we simplify the process for students?"

Dr. Kristen Abernathy noted in the chat that "if we're unclear what policies are in place, our students are sure to be confused. We need to make sure to communicate/follow-up with students what's happening with S/Us, etc."

Dr. Belk stated in the chat that "people had until the very last day of classes to make their choices. Most of their grades were likely already in besides the final. They also had advising. Thus, it seems to me like they had enough information to make a good decision given their own situations, goals, and aspirations."

Ms. Weser noted in the chat, "One of the biggest problems I had with the revised system was that I had students who did not ask anyone else, chose to S/U but actually had a good enough grade in the course. They should have NOT taken an S/U (at least that is how I would have advised them if they had asked).

Dr. Belk replied in the chat, "You set up all these check points for students to interact with their instructors, advisers, etc., but they still might not do so. I also had a high performing student take the S/U but ended up with an A in the class. Taking the S/U, however, relieved this student's anxiety—an actual condition."

Ms. Weser noted in the chat, "Mine too abj. But, you do make a good point about peace of mind. Which I know is certainly a thing, especially now."

Dr. Wendy Sellers spoke that the reasoning behind the grading system in the spring was the big concern over scholarship retention. She talked about LIFE Scholarship requirements. It was in good faith this was brought forward.

Dr. Belk responded that in the Political Science department, they were aggressive with advising and felt like they had a good chart to help advisees understand. He felt like this product that came out of AC was fair and people tried to help students make good choices.

Dr. Costner said he and Dr. Belk were consulted about the All-S/U policy in the spring. He talked about how the College of Education handled students with S/Us. We wondered whether their efforts caused any student to switch back to regular grading from the S/U.

Ms. Jones talked about the S/U report—every week, she sent an S/U report to the colleges that reported who had elected the S/U that week and who had chosen all S/Us. The deans wanted this information so people could follow-up on this.

Dr. Kristen Abernathy asked if faculty could get notified when a student requested the S/U.

Ms. Jones indicated that yes, that could be possible.

Dr. Costner said this would give the instructor a chance to say whether it was in the student's best interest. He noted that the S/U deadline will be at the end of the semester so students could still switch. Dr. McLaine clarified that this will also be the withdrawal deadline.

Dr. Hayes asked if a student rescinded an S/U during the semester, could they add it to another course? Ms. Jones said they could do this. She mentioned an S/U report which catches anyone electing more than one.

Dr. Hoffman asked if students were aware of this. He didn't think they were. He added that we need a better GPA calculator to accommodate S/U. Ms. Jones mentioned the DegreeWorks calculator. Dr. Hoffman said it does not show a student whether an S/U is better than a grade. [note: S/U doesn't affect GPA and therefore doesn't need to be added. The DW calculator only determines grades that affect the GPA.]

Dr. Costner asked if there was a video tutorial on how to use the GPA calculator. Ms. Jones replied that we have a tutorial but could not recall if there was a step-by-step tutorial on calculator. She'll look into it. [follow-up: <https://www.winthrop.edu/uploadedFiles/recandreg/GeneralInformation/Determining-Term-GPA-DegreeWorks.pdf>. We will add a note about S/Us].

Mr. Jackson stated that he did not doesn't think that calculator is that hard to use. In the chat he also noted, "I think providing professors a notification when a student elects to S/U their course would be beneficial. It gives the professor the opportunity to step in and provide support to the student(s) during these times. At this point in life, we, as students, can use all the help, motivation, guidance, and inspiration we can get."

Dr. Costner asked how to address other items on the list.

Dr. Belk suggested surveying the students and faculty for their experiences from spring 2020.

Dr. Costner asked Mr. Jackson for his perspective. Mr. Jackson replied to not make it a long survey and make it easily digestible.

Dr. Costner reminded members about the Microsoft Teams chat feature that we could still continue this conversation offline. He mentioned the new chairs of Gen Ed and CUC and will get out that info out this week.

Mr. Drueke said he and Ms. Jones would poll other institutions about what they're doing.

IV. Announcements--none

V. Adjournment

Dr. Costner adjourned the meeting at 3:05 PM.

Appendix A

Spring 2020 grading

From the grade distribution report:

Spring 2020:

855 CR grades awarded (3% of 27,006 total grades)

1255 UN grades awarded (5%)

4755 S grades awarded (18%)

Spring 2019

736 D+, D, D- grades (2.7% of 27,028 total grades),

928 F grades (3%),

345 U grades (1%)

2298 S grades (9%),

We ended up with about the same amount of CR grades as we had D's last year, and UN grades as we had F and U last year. With unlimited number of elected S/U options, we doubled the number of S grades.