


**TO:** Larry Williams, Chair  
Undergraduate Committee

**FROM:** Christina Gola  
Academic Policy and Procedures Subcommittee

**SUBJECT:** UC 11797 12F: Proposal to instate a Grade Replacement Policy

**DATE:** April 19, 2013

APPROVED APR 24 2013  


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The Academic Policy and Procedures subcommittee met several times throughout the 2012-2013 academic year to discuss a proposal from the Student Government Association to instate a grade replacement (exclusion) policy. Participating in discussions were subcommittee members Christina Gola, Willie Munson, Richard Scamell, Shishir Shah, Lesley Sisk, Stephen Soutullo, and Larry Williams. In addition, the subcommittee consulted Debbie Henry, Heidi Kennedy, the ACT committee, and Maggie McCartney and Cedric Bando of SGA.

#### **Background**

During 2011-2012, the Student Government Association voted for a Bill to instate a "Grade Replacement Policy." The bill was then presented as a proposal to the UC Academic Policy subcommittee. The bill proposes to grant freshman the ability to repeat courses for a grade replacement, later revised to grade exclusion. The rationale for the bill is to increase retention, grades, and student success. Based on SGA's research several Texas universities include similar policies in their undergraduate catalogs including Texas A&M University, Texas Tech University, the University of North Texas, the University of Texas at Dallas, and the University of Houston-Downtown.

#### **Details**

The SGA bill outlines the following parameters:

- The policy applies only to a fully admitted, currently enrolled University of Houston undergraduate student who is "First Time in College" (FTIC) as defined by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board
- An eligible student would be allowed to petition exclusion for grades D+ or less from the undergraduate cumulative and term GPA calculation
- Students would apply for grade exclusion through an advisor. The advisor would approve or disapprove, and require intervention if necessary
- If approved, the student must repeat the course in the next long term, excluding mini-sessions
- The original or first grade shall not be excluded from the major or minor GPA
- The original or first grade shall remain on the official transcript and be designated as excluded
- This exclusion would only be permitted for up to a maximum of two courses taken for credit at the University of Houston during the first two terms beginning with the student's initial enrollment at UH

- It can only be applied once per course; any subsequent repeat invalidates the grade exclusion and all attempts will be used in the computation of the cumulative GPA
- Grade exclusion cannot be invoked after the twelve month period beginning with the student's initial enrollment at UH
- Courses for which grades have been excluded will be counted as attempted hours when determining eligibility for tuition rebates and calculating excess credit hours
- Courses excluded are not excluded when determining whether a student is meeting satisfactory academic progress requirements (hours completed) for federal and state financial aid programs.

### Discussion

When APP first received the proposal; the bill was referred to as a Grade Replacement Policy and did not include the requirement to receive approval through an advisor and potential intervention. The APP recommended to the SGA that they rephrase the original language in the bill as a grade exclusion, rather than grade replacement. The grade remains on the transcript, and therefore is not replaced, it's simply excluded from the cumulative GPA calculation.

The APP also recommended to the SGA that they reapprove the bill with an additional clause requiring an intervention or remediation through an advisor. An advisor may require a student to complete some type of intervention to help improve the outcome of the repeated course, if necessary. For example, if a student reports that a poor grade was due to poor time management, the advisor might require the student to attend a time management workshop. Once completed, the advisor can approve the request and the student can enroll in the course a second time. SGA made these changes to their original bill, re-voted to approve, and sent the revised proposal back to APP.

To gather more input about the policy and subsequent process that would need to be established, APP worked with the ACT Committee to gather input from advisors and department deans. They raised several process concerns that could affect the essence of the policy. For example, the short turnaround time for students to apply and retake a course within the first year may not be plausible, especially if an intervention is necessary. Also, who controls the approval, the major department advisor, or the department in which the course was taken? Finally, NSM questioned whether they would have the option to opt out of the policy. This raises further process questions such as how this would affect students who change majors? For example, if a student uses grade exclusion while not an NSM major, then later transfers into NSM, does the grade exclusion still apply? These are questions that need further exploration.

More importantly, the advisors and deans discussed how this policy relates to other student success initiatives already in place. For example, students have the option to withdrawal from courses. Is this a better option for students? How can we better inform students of this option? Could this policy simply delay academic warning or academic probation for struggling students, and ultimately hurt student success? Advisors want to be able to work with students at the academic warning and probation stages; some argued that students may benefit more from academic probation rather than grade exclusion.

An additional item of discussion is how this policy relates to and/or coexists with an existing policy titled: Fulfillment of Grade Requirements for a Degree. This policy is written as follows:

*The cumulative grade point average shall be used to determine the fulfillment of grade requirements with the following differences:*

1. *The grade of I shall be computed as F.*
2. *Upon approval by the dean of the college of the student's major, a maximum of six semester hours, eight in the case of laboratory courses, taken during the first 30 semester hours of undergraduate course work at the university may be eliminated from the computation. The College of Natural Sciences and Mathematics will not eliminate any semester hours of undergraduate course work from the computation of the graduation grade point average for a bachelor's degree.*
  - a. *Neither these grades nor the courses for which they were awarded are removed from the student's official academic record.*
  - b. *These eliminated courses shall not be used to fulfill any degree requirement.*
  - c. *Grades may not be eliminated for courses subsequently repeated.*
  - d. *These exceptions shall be used only to allow a student to achieve the minimum grade point average for graduation.*

There appears to be disagreement about whether these two policies can coexist. An argument can be made that grade exclusion is meant to help new students at the front end of their education, while this existing language is meant to help students graduate. However, there are some potential contradictions between the two policies, such as item c) grades may not be eliminated for courses subsequently repeated. This would possibly mean that a student who used grade exclusion could not also benefit from this policy.

Finally, the APP recently learned that Texas A&M's grade exclusion policy, which serves as one model for this proposed policy, will be removed from the catalog, effective August 2013. According to the Texas A&M registrar's office, the decision is based on consensus that the policy is not improving student success or serving students' best interest as intended.

#### **Recommendation**

We do not have a comprehensive understanding of how this policy will benefit students, especially in relation to current student success policies. We need more time to discuss process logistics, especially those that could affect the policy as it is written now. We believe more investigation is needed to help resolve these issues. We recommend tabling this proposal, and suggest that the SGA work with the UC Student Success Subcommittee to investigate current student success initiatives and revisions to the Grade Exclusion Policy.