

Proposal to Amend the Undergraduate and Graduate Grading Schemes

November 2020

Whereas, for students on financial aid who receive failing (“F”) grades in their courses, the federal government requires that institutions confirm participation in classes at the beginning and at the 60% point of the term;

And whereas, an internal audit found that the current FX grade provides incomplete and unreliable information regarding participation, and therefore does not meet the federal requirement;

And whereas, the collection of student participation information from faculty at the time of grading is less onerous on students, faculty and staff than collecting such information after grades are submitted;

And whereas, such information will be more reliable and consistent if collected at the time of grading using existing grading processes and tools;

And whereas, the FX grade, its meaning, and its appropriate use are often misunderstood by faculty, students, and institutions receiving UB transcripts;

And whereas, when participation information is collected at the time of grading, the FX grade will no longer be necessary;

It is resolved that:

- The FX grade should be removed from the undergraduate and graduate grading schemes.
- At the time of grade entry (via direct entry in the HUB Faculty Center or by file upload), faculty shall provide information regarding whether students who receive failing (“F”) grades never participated, participated but stopped attending prior to the 60% point of the class, or participated after the 60% point of the class; and
- The appropriate administrative offices shall ensure that the definition of “participation” is clearly communicated to faculty.

Note: It is recommended that the professional programs who define their own grading schemes (DDS, JD, and MD) also adopt these changes.

Note: When implementing this policy revision, the Office of the Registrar and UBIT should seek to improve the grade submission process to make it more efficient and less onerous on faculty and to ensure minimal disruption to academic freedom.

See following pages for additional information on this resolution.

Additional information:**Internal Audit Finding (excerpt from Audit Report dated September 24, 2020)**

UB Financial Aid Office complies with the Attendance requirements for awarding Title IV grant and loan funds in accordance with 34 CFR 668.21 and 690.80.

Internal Audit noted the current "FX" grade is flawed. Based on the 03/15/18 memo "F and FX Grades – Spring 2018", the FX grade should be assigned to all students who either

1) never attended a class or

2) attended up to or less than the 60% point in semester (unofficial withdrawal).

As currently defined, the FX grade makes it impossible to determine if attendance began or not (per 34 CFR 668.21) and whether enrollment status changed (per 34 CFR 690.80). Therefore, recalculation is not currently performed and may result in overpayment of PELL. Financial Aid Office estimated potential overpayment of PELL aid at \$90,741 for Fall 2019.

Internal Audit recommends implementing three separate grades:

- a grade for never attending class
- a grade for unofficial withdraw, which is attending up to but less than 60% of a semester
- a grade for students that attended class and obtained a failing grade.

These three grades should be clearly communicated prior to the start of each semester to ensure universal adoption.

Background:

In order to ensure that financial aid is disbursed to students accurately, the University at Buffalo must confirm eligibility requirements for each student prior to the disbursement of financial aid. One requirement for disbursement is that a student must be enrolled and participating in the required number of credits. Credit requirements vary for different financial aid programs.

Since the Financial Aid Office disburses aid to the majority of students prior to the first day of each term, UB must have a mechanism in place to determine that the student actually enrolled and was participating in the required number of credits at the start of the term (or prior to the disbursement of their financial aid if their aid was distributed after our usual disbursement date).

In addition to this requirement, a student must maintain enrollment and participation in all of their courses through at least the 60% point of the semester in order to retain their financial aid. Students who do not maintain enrollment in all courses may be required to return a portion or all of the financial aid received for that term.

UB's current method for monitoring the enrollment and participation of students has been determined to be insufficient to meet federal requirements and exposes the university to financial liability.

Proposed resolution:

Rather than adding grades as proposed by Internal Audit, we are proposing to remove the FX grade and instead supplement F grades with the information needed. Because it is currently inconsistently used by faculty, we recommend removal of the FX grade from the grading scheme. In lieu of the FX grade, a separate reason field would be created and stored in a way that it was queryable for financial aid purposes, but would not be displayed on the academic transcript. The goal of our proposed resolution is to promote faculty compliance while minimizing perceived disruption to academic freedom and the grade submission process. We are also seeking to implement in a manner that avoids further complication of our grading scale.

When faculty enter grades into HUB, for all F grades, faculty will be prompted to provide the reason for assigning the failing grade (or the faculty will provide the reason in their CSV file if they are uploading grades). The reason will be selected from the following options:

1. The student did not participate in class.
2. The student participated, but stopped participating before 60% of the session had elapsed.
3. The student participated after 60% of the session had elapsed and earned a failing grade.

For those students who receive financial aid, the Financial Aid Office will review F grades and reasons. If aid eligibility is impacted, the Financial Aid will reach out to the faculty member for any additional information needed to appropriately adjust (or not) the student's aid. Should faculty not comply with the request from Financial Aid, Academic Affairs can assist in obtaining the necessary information.

Implementation for fall 2021:

1. Discuss implementation with Faculty Senate Academic Policy and Grading Committee – October 2020
 - a. Faculty Senate approval is needed to proceed with removing the FX grade. Reason codes can proceed even if the FX grade remains an option.
2. Develop and test customization in HUB – October 2020 – July 2021
3. Create informational website for faculty, including guidance related to what constitutes participation for this purpose – August 2021
4. Communicate change to faculty – August 2021
5. Launch changes in HUB – September 2021

First Reading: February 16, 2021

Second Reading: March 16, 2021, passed with simple majority