

ACADEMIC SENATE  
of  
CALIFORNIA POLYTECHNIC STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN LUIS OBISPO

AS-118-81/IC  
May 26, 1981

RESOLUTION ON +/- GRADING

**Background:** In response to recommendations from the CSUC Academic Senate and the Cal Poly Task Force on Grade Inflation, the Instruction Committee has been reviewing the grading system. The resulting resolution on Grade Definitions and Guidelines (passed February 17) established letter grade definitions which relate to performance levels, levels of achievement of course objectives, satisfactory progress toward graduation, and levels of preparation for enrollment in subsequent courses. Although the new grade definitions reasonably define the middle of each grade level, each category (especially B and C) still seems to encompass a very broad range of student performances and levels of preparation. The high C student and low B student, for example, are generally much closer in levels of achievement and preparation than the high C and low C students, yet the current grade system does not accurately reflect that.

The results of several informal polls (in which approximately 20% of the entire faculty participated) reveal considerable dissatisfaction with the current grade system. There was significant support (approximately 80% of respondents) for a grade system which allowed better discrimination between the current letter grade categories. The reasons cited for recommending a grading policy change stressed that allowing plus and minus levels within each grade category would be a fairer evaluation when student performance levels can be so distinguished. It has also been suggested that some of student test anxiety--especially during final exams--may actually be grade anxiety. The student is very conscious that falling just below a grade decision line can "cost" an entire grade point per unit credit. Although increasing the number of grade levels would increase the number of grade decision lines, the unit credits would increase in small increments, hence, there is less "risk" associated with being just below a line.

The proposed grading system is relatively common among universities..Five of the U.C. campuses, seven of the CSUC campuses, and a number of private institutions in the state currently use a grading system which records +/- grades. And a report (dated March, 1981) to the Educational Policies Committee of the CSUC Academic Senate, entitled "Selected Studies of Grade Reporting" recommends that the Senate urge individual campuses to adopt plus/minus grading systems.

**RESOLVED:** That the grading system be modified to record plus (+) and minus (-) symbols with the current letter grades when assigned by faculty and that the corresponding grade point assignments be as follows:

A	4.0
A-	3.7
B+	3.3
B	3.0
B-	2.7
C+	2.3
C	2.0
C-	1.7
D+	1.3
D	1.0
D-	0.7
F	0

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**RESOLVED:** That when a student is to be graded on a CR/NC basis the grade CR will be assigned for grades C- and above and NC will be assigned for grades D+ and below.

Notes Regarding the Resolution on +/- Grading

The definitions of the letter grades A, B, C, D, F, and CR/NC are not affected by this resolution.

The plus and minus grades can be used to indicate levels of achievement or performance within each grade category.

Borderline grade decisions which faculty now make (between B and C, for example) must still be made. But the option to assign B- and C+ grades to students near that borderline would exist.

The grade point averages of those students who find themselves consistently just above or just below a grade decision line would more precisely reflect the performance levels of those students.

The very wide range of achievement levels of students who now receive C grades would appear as a range from C- to C+ if faculty make use of the +/- grades.

No A+ grade is included as the grade A already indicates an excellent achievement of course objectives. It is expected that offering a grade level above 4.0 would lead to a downward adjustment of GPA's by employers and graduate schools.

No F+ grade is included as that grade would seem to be meaningless if no course credit is obtained.

The grade CR should correspond to C-, etc., since the current C/D grade decision line would fall between the C- and D+ with the new grade levels. There is thus no change in performance level required to receive the grade CR. The requirement that a student maintain a GPA of at least 2.0 to be eligible for graduation is not affected by this resolution.