

Adopted: June 1, 1999

**ACADEMIC SENATE  
Of  
CALIFORNIA POLYTECHNIC STATE UNIVERSITY  
San Luis Obispo, CA**

**AS-528-99/CC  
RESOLUTION ON  
C- PREREQUISITES**

- WHEREAS, The handful of courses in the catalog which designate C- as a minimum grade required for advancement in a sequence appear in violation of the catalog's standard university grading policy; and
- WHEREAS, It can be legitimately argued that the level of competence required of students for a course in a sequence may be set higher than that required for a terminal course; and
- WHEREAS, Students may have performed poorly in a class, demonstrating insufficient knowledge to advance to the next course, but still have done well enough to receive a passing grade of D. (A C- prerequisite would stop advancement, but still grant credit); and
- WHEREAS, Departments should have the right to stop students from advancing to the next course in a major sequence if they have determined students are unprepared to do the work; and
- WHEREAS, Two kinds of students might take a major class: students in the major, and students from outside the major who are taking the class as support in their own major or for other reasons. The instructor may need a way to grant the non-major students credit for the course by assigning a D, while also stopping the major students from advancing to the next course by enforcing the C- prerequisite; therefore, be it
- RESOLVED: That departments may designate a C- as the minimum grade required for students to advance to the next course in a sequence if the C- minimum is clearly indicated under the catalog description for the class; and, be it further
- RESOLVED: That "or consent of instructor" be included along with the C- prerequisite in sequenced courses to allow individual students the opportunity to make a case for exceptions; and, be it further
- RESOLVED: That a footnote under the university grading policy in the catalog be added to alert students to the possibility that certain sequenced courses may have a C- prerequisite for advancement; and, be it further
- RESOLVED: That C- prerequisites be enforced by departmental faculty or advisors (not the Records Office) during the AddIDrop period.

Proposed (but not supported) by: The Academic Senate  
Curriculum Committee  
Date: April 30, 1999  
Revised: June 1, 1999

## BACKGROUND STATEMENT ON GRADING POLICY RESOLUTIONS

**THE PROBLEM:** The handful of courses in the catalog which designate C- as a minimum grade required for advancement in a sequence are in violation of the catalog's standard university grading policy, leading to self-contradiction.

**THE SOLUTION:** Either stick with the Standard Grading Policy (the resolution supported by the Curriculum Committee), or footnote the policy in a way that allows an exception for C- Prerequisites for advancement (opposed by the Curriculum Committee).

While it may seem odd that the Senate Curriculum Committee is bringing you two diametrically opposed resolutions, we are doing so because some definitive solution to the grading policy problem must be found. The reasons behind each resolution are outlined in the Whereas clauses. In the case of the resolution in favor of C- Prerequisites, we have tried to present the other side's strongest arguments, even though we oppose this resolution. With regard to the resolution we support-the one upholding the Standard Grading Policy-here is some additional background information and reasoning.

Despite the fact that faculty'S first instinct may well be to allow individual departments complete autonomy in deciding how to handle grading in their major courses and that to do anything else may seem counterintuitive, the Curriculum Committee encourages the Senate to consider carefully the rationale (Whereas clauses) for upholding the Standard Grading Policy.

**GRADE INFLATION:** We suspect that one reason some faculty are in favor of C- prerequisites is that these may seem like a way to enforce standards without having to assign tough grades. With C- prerequisites, faculty can avoid giving Fs, but at the same time they can stop students from advancing to the next course in a sequence. But C- prerequisites seem to us like the wrong approach to the problem of grade inflation which has led to lower standards. We believe that faculty should give students the grades they earn instead of giving them higher grades and then telling them they didn't really pass and they cannot advance to the next course. Students who perform failing work in a class should be assigned an F (officially defined as "Non-Attainment of Course Objectives"). It is unjustified and inconsistent for faculty to assign students a D (which officially gives them credit for the course), then tell students they cannot advance to the next course.

**INTERDEPARTMENTAL STRIFE:** The C- prerequisite is likely to create problems and conflicts between departments. Consider: students from department 1 are taking support classes in a sequence from department 2. Department 2 institutes a prerequisite whereby students cannot advance in the sequence unless they earn a C-. Department 1 may disagree with this policy, but department 2 is enforcing its prerequisite on department 1's students-a prerequisite that departs from the standard university grading policy-and slowing these students' progress toward the degree.

**CREDIT/NO CREDIT:** It has been noted that, if a C- is necessary for credit in a class taken Credit/No Credit, then it is inconsistent to grant credit for a D received by a student in a graded class. However, part of the trade-off that students make when they take a class Credit/No Credit is that, in return for the protection that doing so gives to their GPA, they must actually earn a higher grade (at least a C-) in order to pass the course than would be necessary if they were taking the class for a grade. Thus, the discrepancy between these letter-grade and Credit/No Credit minimums is built into the concept of Credit/No Credit. Furthermore, even if one grants the argument that there should not be an inconsistency between letter-grade and Credit/No Credit minimums, the way to fix this structural problem would hardly seem to be to institute C- prerequisites on an ad hoc, course-by-course basis, which would provide a piecemeal and confusing solution to the problem.

**ADVISING:** A footnote under the standard university grading policy in the current catalog states that students who receive below a C- in a class that is a prerequisite for another course are encouraged to repeat the prerequisite class before attempting the next course in the sequence. Nothing precludes departmental advisors from stressing this point. We believe that this is a matter for internal advising and not something that should be institutionalized through ad hoc, course-by-course exceptions to the catalog's standard grading policy.

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**Memorandum**

SEP 2 1999

SAN LUIS OBISPO  
CA 93407

Academic Senate

To: Myron Hood  
Chair, Academic Senate

Date: August 30, 1999

From:   
Warren I. Baker  
President

Copies: P. Zingg, D. Conn,  
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Subject: Response to Academic Senate Resolution AS-528-99/CC-Resolution on C- Prerequisites

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Based upon the recommendations of the Provost's staff, I am pleased to approve the above subject resolution. By copy of this memorandum, I will ask the college deans to note the final resolved clause to emphasize to their respective departments that it will be the responsibility of the academic departments to enforce the prerequisite requirements during the Add/Drop registration period. It is not feasible for the Academic Records Office to monitor this process.

Please express my appreciation to both the Academic Senate and the Curriculum Committee for their efforts in this regard.