

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Annual Report of the Educational Policy Committee to Faculty Council
April 12, 2016

Membership:

Jennifer Coble (Chair, Biology, At-Large, 2017); David Garcia (Music, At-Large, 2018); GerShun Avilez (English and Comparative Literature; At-Large, 2018); Jeannie Loeb (Psychology and Neuroscience, At-Large, 2018), Theresa Raphael-Grimm (Nursing & Medicine, At-Large, 2017); Geetha Vaidyanathan (Economics, At-Large, 2017); Lauren Leve (Religious Studies; At-Large, 2016); Gidi Shemer (Biology, At-Large, 2016); Kristin Reiter (Health Policy and Management; At-Large, 2016); Karthik Sundaram (Undergraduate Student); Anel Jaramillo (Graduate Student, GPSF); Chris Derickson (University Registrar, ex-officio); Abigail Panter (College of Arts and Sciences; ex-officio)

Committee Charge:

The committee is concerned with those matters of educational policy and its implementation as to which the Faculty Council possess legislative powers by delegation from the General faculty under Article II of the Code. The committee's function is advisory to the Faculty Council and the University Registrar.

Summary of Major Activities:

During the 2015-2016 academic year, the EPC considered the following topics and/or took the following actions:

1. Revision of Pass/D+/D/Fail Policy

With changes in the drop/add timeframe and the increase in the number of credits that can be taken "pass/fail," the EPC decided to take a comprehensive look at the pass/fail grading policy and made the following policy revision recommendations:

- Change our current Pass/D/D+/F to simply Pass/Fail. F is fail, D or above is passing. F continues to count in the GPA.
- Revise the proportion of P/F credits students can take while not increasing the overall number. In the revised policy, students can take 23 credits P/F, with no more than 16 declared by the student and no more than 13 in University P/F courses.
- Previous courses taken for a letter grade cannot be repeated as Pass/Fail.
- The P/F policy should be simplified so students can only take one student-elected P/F course during full academic semesters (fall and spring).

These recommendations were approved in the May 7, 2015 EPC meeting and became Resolution 2015-12 On Revising the Pass/D+/D/Fail Option, which was approved by Faculty Council in the October 30, 2015 meeting.

2. "Honors Carolina Laureate" Transcript Remark Approval

In its advisory role to the Registrar, the EPC approved the "Honors Carolina Laureate" transcript remark for graduates (starting May 2016) who successfully complete the Honors Carolina program.

3. Revision of Academic Eligibility Policy

The Academic Eligibility Policy, described in the Undergraduate Bulletin, determines whether a student is allowed to continue enrollment at UNC-Chapel Hill. In 2014, UNC's General Administration issued revised standards for the UNC system in the "Fostering Undergraduate Student Success (FUSS)" standards. Specifically, these standards require that academic eligibility policies "*must, at a minimum, be in accord with Federal Title IV regulations and should include the use of academic success contracts where appropriate.*" Thus UNC's academic eligibility policy was revised to be in accord with Federal Title IV regulations. In addition, the revision of the policy provided an opportunity to reconsider the aspect of the academic eligibility policy that addresses students' ability to enroll in a 9th or 10th semester. Cynthia Demetriou, the Associate Dean and Director for Retention and chair of the Academic Eligibility Implementation Committee, shared her concern with the EPC over the impact of the 9th and 10th semester rule on transfer students. Data from the Office of Institutional Research & Assessment reveal a lower graduation rate among junior transfer students as compared to students who start as freshman at UNC. In addition, from Fall 2011 to Spring 2015, 100% of appeals for a 9th semester from transfer students were approved. In the January meeting, the EPC voted unanimously to approve the revisions mandated by the FUSS standards and the addition of revisions allowing transfer students (who transfer in the UNC-CH equivalent of 2 or more semesters of credit) to enroll in up to ten total semesters without having to seek permission via an appeal. Students who enter as first years are still required to apply and receive permission to enroll in for a ninth or tenth semester. These revision recommendations became "Resolution 2016-6 On Undergraduate Academic Eligibility", which was passed by Faculty Council in the February meeting.

4. Revising Class Attendance Policy

The current UNC attendance policy outlines specific expectations for absences due to religious observations, which are protected by federal law. It does not state expectations for make up work and/or alternative assessments for other excused absences including students who are absent due to a university sanctioned event. Some students feel they have been penalized when they were absent for a university sanctioned event. Provost Dean, in collaboration with the Student-Athlete Academic Initiative Working Group, sent a proposed revision of the Class Attendance Policy for EPC consideration. The proposal included a new section outlining specific expectations for what instructors should do when students with excused absences miss work or assessments. In discussions over the proposed revisions, the EPC expressed concern about proposed language that requires instructors to provide an alternative assessment if a student misses an exam due to an excused absence. The EPC believes that offering alternative assessments for all students with an excused absence is impractical for instructors. A sub-committee, composed of Jeannie Loeb and Gidi Shemer, recommended policy language with the goal of preventing students from being penalized from an excused absence while not placing an unfair burden on course instructors. These recommendations were approved in the January 2016 EPC meeting. Under the direction of Abigail Panter, this policy language is currently being reviewed by a broader set of campus constituencies including UNC students, the Dean of Students, Counseling and Psychological Services, Student Health, advisors from the College and professional schools and University Counsel. Once these reviews have been conducted the EPC will consider any additional policy revisions that are brought to the EPC, and draft final recommendations for the Class Attendance Policy to be presented to Faculty Council.

5. Priority Registration Requests

The EPC received two requests for the expansion of priority registration to additional student groups in the 2015-2016 academic year.

Incoming first year students: First, the Student-Athlete Academic Initiative Working Group submitted a proposal to expand priority registration to incoming 1st year student-athletes. Chris Derickson shared data revealing there are significantly fewer course sections available for a student athlete with a common practice schedule than for a non-athlete for many common first year courses. These data highlighted the unusual challenges incoming student athletes face with respect to registration that could inhibit their academic progress and threaten their timely graduation. In the April meeting, the EPC approved the extension of priority registration to incoming first year students starting in Fall 2016. As is the policy for priority registration, student groups currently approved for priority registration, including student athletes, will be able to submit names of incoming first year students to the Priority Registration Advisory Committee (PRAC) to be granted priority registration status.

Honors students: The EPC also received a proposal from Jim Leloudis, Dean for Honors Carolina, to expand priority registration privileges to Honors Carolina students. The proposal argued that Honors Carolina students need priority registration to be able to move into their major coursework earlier due to the significant course credits they bring to UNC due to AP and IB courses. In addition, the lack of priority registration puts UNC at a competitive disadvantage since many peer institutions offer priority registration to their honors students and the existence of priority registration is a factor in the ranking of public university honors programs, the lack of which resulted in UNC falling short of earning a top rank. Thus, the lack of priority registration privileges for Honors Carolina students could place UNC at a distinct competitive disadvantage in drawing top undergraduate talent. The EPC was sympathetic to the unique needs of Honors Carolina students. While some members supported the addition of Honors Carolina students to priority registration, the committee did not feel they could approve this request since adding the large number of honors students would increase the total percent of students granted priority registration to above 15%. The current priority registration policy, passed by FC in 2013, includes a recommendation that no more than 5-6 % of the student body be granted priority registration status.

The EPC plans to revisit the priority registration policies in the 2017-2018 academic year to assess if the current 5-6% maximum recommended percent of priority registration students is appropriate given the registration needs of all UNC students. With incoming student athletes added to the priority registration, the total percentage of priority registrants is approximately 7.5%. While the EPC recognizes the hardship that some student groups face, including student-athletes, it also recognizes that it is untenable to keep increasing the number of priority registrants given that this further disadvantages students without priority registration. We ask that the University continue to examine ways to offer courses at more diverse times in order to better accommodate the needs of all students.

The EPC is also interested in exploring alternative registration options with Chris Derickson that might allow students who face an unusual registration challenge to get access to courses they need while not disadvantaging other students who also face challenges in registering for the courses they need to make timely graduation.

6. Contextualized transcript

In early December 2014, a final version of the contextualized transcript was made available to students on the Faculty Executive Committee. The students raised concerns over the lack of assessment of the transcript prompting the Faculty Executive Committee to discuss this in its December 2, 2014 meeting. This committee expressed concerns about the potential harm of implementing a transcript before an evaluation of transcript accuracy and interpretation is carried out and the Chancellor called for a delay in the implementation until the Educational Policy Committee could review these issues. Because there is a standing resolution to implement the contextualized transcript, EPC's role around this issue is interpreted through the wording of the original resolution 2011-3 Section 4 under Implementation 5, "To the extent that any element of this Resolution proves impracticable, the registrar shall report this situation to the Educational Policy Committee for consideration of amendment".

As a group EPC has spent several months discussing implementation issues raised by the registrar with regard to the contextualized transcript, and has identified several impracticable issues that make implementation of contextualized transcript untenable at this time. The following issues surrounding operations and implementation are of critical importance for transcript accuracy and represent potential risks to our students.

- **Contextual Information Accuracy:** The sample transcript presented to the Faculty Executive Council had an error in the SPA calculation despite a great deal of effort dedicated to programming and data quality. Thus the EPC has expressed concerns over the accuracy of the computations used to generate contextualized data and the university's ability to generate contextualized transcripts error free.
- **Transcript Audit Capability:** Currently, there is a lack of an audit system to archive the contextual data and allow for audit of a generated transcript. In the current system, all of the contextualized data is calculated on demand and put directly on the transcript. These data are not stored in a separate table, which makes it very difficult to validate the contextual values.
- **Changing contextual grade information:** Since both the SPA and percentile ranges are calculated from all of the grades in a class, the values can change over time due to the impact of temporary grades (Incomplete (IN) and All But Exam (AB)) which register as F's in calculations. Thus, the SPA and percentile values recorded on transcripts will be higher when incomplete grades are present and lower when these grades are replaced with permanent grades. This disadvantages some students who request transcripts after permanent grades have been recorded.
- **Point in time reporting** - In the original resolution, the implementation of the contextual transcripts would apply to all students. This would result in some students receiving SPA values from calculations of a single semester worth of grade data. SPA values from such a small amount of data may not be representative of a student's broader academic performance and could disadvantage students, particularly graduating seniors at the time of policy implementation.
- **Interpretation of Contextual grade information:** Currently, no data exists to assess the clarity and interpretation of contextual grade information by transcript consumers (employers, graduate school admissions officers). The EPC believes that data on how transcript consumers will interpret the contextual information in evaluating UNC students and how contextual information will influence comparisons between UNC students and students from other institutions is essential to ensure that the contextual information will not disadvantage our students in competitive situations.

- **Other considerations** During our long and thoughtful deliberations many important questions were raised and opinions shared around the concept of the contextual grade information itself. From those discussions, important questions emerged, which include:
 - Is grade inflation as much of a concern or trend as it was believed to be when contextualized transcripts were originally proposed?
 - Will the contextualized transcript serve its original purpose of curbing grade inflation?
 - Does contextual grade reporting influence the implementation of evidence-based, active learning pedagogies that rely on a high level of student collaboration and an emphasis on competency-based rather than norm-based grading?
 - Is there sound data that can be used to examine the advantages and disadvantages of norm-based vs. competency-based grading?
 - Is the contextualized transcript more advantageous in certain courses, such as those in the sciences where percentile and ranking are important in graduate school admission reviews?
 - What are the national trends in transcript formats and should new trends be considered before the contextualized transcript is implemented?

The committee could not reach consensus on whether implementation should move forward in the event that the accuracy and interpretability issues were resolved. More data is needed for EPC to effectively deliberate about whether there is evidence to support the rescinding of Resolution 2011-3.

In the April 8th meeting, the EPC approved a proposal by the University Registrar, Chris Derickson, to form a working group of UNC faculty, staff and students to support a more detailed examination and assessment of the implementation concerns stated above. The working group will be assembled in Spring 2016 and will report its analysis to the EPC by January 2017. After this working group provides its analysis and recommendations to the EPC, the committee will make its recommendation to Faculty Council on appropriate next steps.

Report respectfully submitted by Jennifer Coble, April 12, 2016.