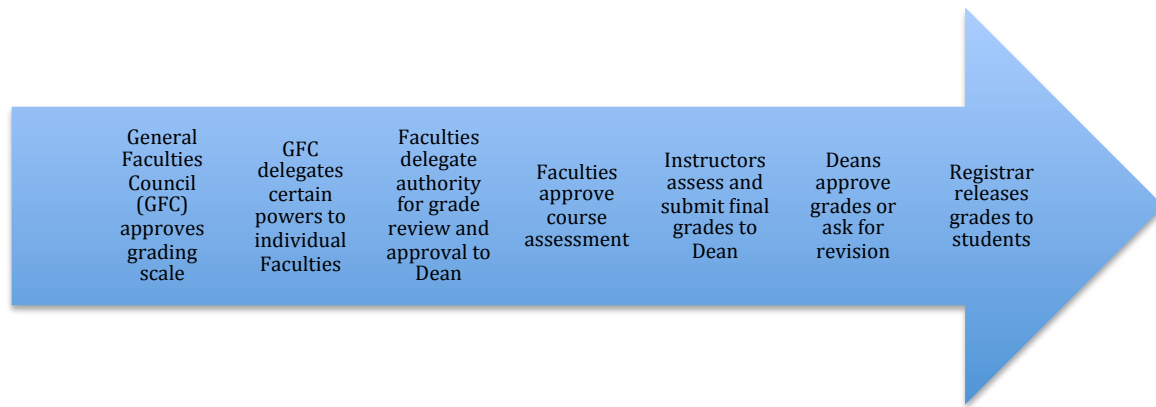


**Understanding Grading at Concordia
Presentation to the CSA
Tim Loreman, VPA and Provost, July 2016**

Visual overview



Process

Grading at Concordia is governed by section 9.3 of our Academic Calendar. The following scale has been approved for use. An expanded descriptive scale is also available in the Academic Calendar and can be found in the syllabus for most courses. This has been what has been used at CUE since 2003. Because of this, instructors should not include different information in their syllabus, although they may include additional information outside of the syllabus if they wish.

FOUR-POINT GRADING SCALE		
Descriptor	Alpha Grade	Grade Point Value
Excellent	A+	4.0
	A	4.0
	A-	3.7
Good	B+	3.3
	B	3.0
	B-	2.7
Satisfactory	C+	2.3
	C	2.0
	C-	1.7
Poor	D+	1.3
Minimal Pass	D	1.0
Fail	F	0
Other Final Grades:		
AE	Aegrotat standing	
AU	Audit	
AW	Auditor withdrew	
CR	Credit (C- or higher)	
I	Incomplete	
IP	Course in progress	
NC	No credit	
W	Withdrew with permission	
WF	Withdrew failing (As of September 2003, a WF is counted as a grade of F [zero] in the calculation of the Grade Point Average)	

- All courses are approved by our General Faculties Council. At the time of approval Departments outline their evaluation criteria, and the weighting of assignments and exams. Instructors are not at liberty to unilaterally change these after approval has been granted, although reasonable flexibility is provided for.
- Grades must be monitored and approved to ensure consistency across programs and to guard against egregious grade inflation or deflation. The Terms of Reference for each Faculty delegate authority for grade approval to the Dean. The Dean will ask instructors to revise and adjust their grades where there is evidence of unreasonable inflation or deflation.

Instructors and grading

- Grading on a ‘normal curve’ is not sanctioned and is not expected at Concordia, however, good teaching, sound assessment practices, and rigorous but reasonable course content usually result in a distribution of grades along a continuum.
- Instructors use various means to arrive at an alpha (letter) grade in their courses. A percentage-based approach is used by some, but there can be issues with this (See the article by Guskey, 2013). Consistent with practice at the U of A, grade points and letter grades reflect judgements of student achievement performance in a class. One alternative to tying percentages to letter grades would be that instructors mark in terms of raw scores, rank the papers in order of merit, and assign an appropriate grade to each paper. There are other alternatives depending on the discipline and assignment or exam content.

- Instructors are obliged to inform students of their progress throughout semester. When going into final exams, students should all know where they stand and what level of performance is expected to attain their desired result.

Grade inflation and deflation: What are the issues?

- Grade inflation or deflation typically result from one of two issues:
 - The course content was not adequately challenging or was too difficult with respect to the level at which it is offered.
 - The assessment in the course was problematic and did not allow for discrimination between students.
- What is the problem with grade inflation and deflation?
 - Institutional reputation is harmed. The value of our degrees is connected to our reputation.
 - Students who merit very high grades are not adequately recognized when inflation occurs because those who do not merit such grades are placed in the same category.
 - Students who merit low and failing grades are not adequately discerned when grade deflation occurs.
- *An argument might be made that in a very small class students get more attention from the instructor and therefore get higher grades.* While occasional anomalous years may occur, over the course of a number of years the distribution of grades should to some degree normalize. According to Stake (2002, p. 592) and with reference to small classes “over time...any given teacher's mean in such classes ought to fluctuate around the school average and not be biased in one direction or the other.”
- *An argument might be made that some teachers are better than others, and that students in their courses should get higher grades.* This is a problematic argument from many perspectives, including the fact that ‘good teaching’ is not a well-defined concept and is typically self-reported. Further, “...even if a teacher can produce evidence of better learning, it does not follow ineluctably that his students should receive higher grades.” (Stake, 2002, p. 590)
- *An argument might be made that in higher-level 300 and 400 courses students are more experienced and motivated, and should therefore do better.* This is true to an extent, however, courses at these levels should also be targeted at a more advanced level and performance expectations should be higher. Connected to grade distribution are course pre-requisites. Students should enter a course with the required basic knowledge, and grades are determined on the basis of the established goals for that course. Typically students achieving ‘A’s are those submitting outstanding work and such performance is, by its very nature, uncommon.

Concluding comments:

Overall, Concordia's approach to grading can be characterized as one that is designed to be fair to all students. The goal is to provide students with an accurate picture of their performance achievements in the courses they take, and in doing so to enhance the reputation and integrity of the institution. The value of the degrees earned by our current students and our alumni are therefore better protected.

References

- Guskey, T.R. (2013). The case against percentage grades. *Educational Leadership*, 71(1), 68-72.
- Stake, J.E. (2002). Making the grade: Some principles of comparative grading. *Articles by Maurer Faculty. Paper 205*. <http://www.repository.law.indiana.edu/facpub/205>