

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

S.03-49

As amended
by Senate
Apr 7 /03

MEMORANDUM

To: Senate

From: A. MacKinnon, Chair
Senate Committee on Undergraduate Studies

Subject: Proposed change of DE from grade to notation
(SCUS Reference 02-9)

Date: March 25, 2003

Action undertaken at the March 18, 2003 meeting of the Senate Committee on Undergraduate Studies gives rise to the following motion:

MOTION

"That Senate approve the change of the DE grade to a notation as set forth in S.03-49 effective 2003-3."

Current Text

DE Grades

The grade DE will be given when a physician's certificate or other document substantiating a request for deferment on medical or compassionate grounds is received by the registrar or the chair of the department concerned within four days of the date from which the final examination was to have been written, or when the course instructor wishes to defer submitting a final mark pending completion of further work by the student. To be awarded, the DE grade must be submitted by the instructor and approved by the chair. All unchanged deferred grades will be converted automatically to F after the fifth day of classes of the semester immediately following the one in which the grade was awarded. In exceptional cases, an extension may be granted by the department chair upon petition by the student.

Proposed Text

DE Notation

The DE notation will be given when a physician's certificate or other document substantiating a request for deferment on medical or compassionate grounds is received by the registrar or the chair of the department concerned within four days of the date from which the final examination was to have been written, or when the course instructor wishes to defer submitting a final mark pending completion of further work by the student. The DE notation must be submitted by the instructor with a recommended length of deferral and approved by the chair. All unchanged DE notations will be converted automatically to F after the ~~expiry of the specified deferral period~~. In exceptional cases, an extension may be granted by the department chair upon petition by the student.

fifth day of classes of the semester immediately following the one in which the notation was awarded.

Rationale

SCUS is recommending to Senate that the deferred grade, DE, be changed from a grade to a notation. There are a number of implications of this change.

As described in the 02/03 Calendar (p. 44), the course grade of DE can be granted in two situations.

- When a student is unable to sit a final exam and requests deferment on medical or compassionate grounds.
- When the instructor wishes to defer submitting a final mark pending completion of further work by the student.

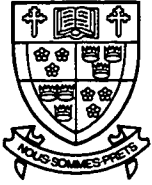
The DE grade, which must be submitted by the instructor and approved by the chair, is factored into GPA calculations as a failing grade unless and until it is changed to a letter grade through submission of an approved change of grade form. If no such submission is received by the end of the fifth day of the following semester, the DE grade is replaced by a grade of F on the student's transcript.

The negative impact of a DE grade on the GPA is problematical, since it can unfairly penalize students who are applying for scholarships or graduate school or even for graduation. The solution that has been recommended to SCUS is to make DE a notation rather than a grade. A notation maintains descriptive utility but has no effect on GPA calculations.

Concerns have been expressed that removing the disincentive from the DE (that it affects the GPA) might make it much more attractive to students who wanted to spread their academic work beyond the normal semester limits.

SCUS members believe the best way to address the concerns is by education and monitoring. The Registrar will remind instructors and Chairs of the proper procedures for processing DE requests, and the Registrar's Office will monitor the frequency with which DE grades are granted. The Registrar will then follow-up on any significant increases. The reminder will be circulated with the announcement of the change, should Senate approve it. In addition the reminder will include the following information:

- The instructor is responsible for establishing the recommended length of deferral, and must report that date to the Chair when submitting the DE recommendation.
- The recommended length of deferral should be determined by the nature and extent of the extenuating circumstance that warrants the DE request.
- The deadline by which the student must complete the exam and/or other course assignment
- When the deferment is of a final exam, instructors will include with their DE recommendation the documentary support submitted by the student.



**SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY, Admissions
OFFICE OF THE DEAN OF STUDENT SERVICES AND REGISTRAR**

From: Nick Heath
Date: 2002 02 14
To: SCUS
Title: DE grades in research courses

This topic arose because of difficult situations faced by two good students in different programs in January 2002. The situation is familiar to those who work in financial assistance, scholarship administration and other related areas.

In one 9 credit u/g thesis course in Fall 2001, the grade distribution at the end of Week 3 of the following semester was:

P	2students	20%
DE	8 students	80%

Each of the 10 is an Honors student in her/his penultimate or final semester.

Completion of the research course and passing it has no effect on the cgpa – the grading scheme is P/W. However, failure to complete it has a severe penalty, equivalent to 9 sem hrs of F grades.

Some of these students were also taking substantial course loads during the same semester. Seven were taking 11 or more sem hrs credit in addition to the thesis course and one was taking an additional 17 sem hrs of credit for a total course load of 26 credits!

I sent the following message to dept chairs via e-mail on 2002 01 25.

“DE grades may be given when a student requests extra time to complete work. They count as 0.00 in the gpa, the same as F.

All too often, u/g students do not complete within the semester a research project or honors thesis, such as ENSC 499-9. As a result, the student's cgpa is adversely affected at a time when many are attempting to gain admission to graduate programs. Finishing the project in the subsequent semester might appear to be reasonable, but it can mean loss of student status, because there might be no course registration for that semester. This affects eligibility for financial assistance. Loss of scholarships and other financial implications can also ensue.

Is this a problem in your department and if so, what do you think can be can about it?”

Replies received:

Not a problem in that department:

Ellen Gee	(SA)
Alistair Lachlan	(MATH)
Rob Gordon	(CRIM)

Other comments:

Norbert Hauerland BISC

"It is indeed a problem, not only for research projects, but also for students who could not complete a course in a timely manner (e.g., sickness, etc).

Why wouldn't it be possible to exclude DE from the calculation? We would still have to justify extended deferrals, so I don't think it would lead to a flood of no ending DEs."

John D'Auria (Chair SPCSAB)

"Clearly there could be a problem with respect to scholarships as you have pointed out. The solution is not obvious. One could design certain courses such that a DE from such a course would not count on the gpa. When the DE changes to a letter grade, then the gpa would be upgraded. This is tricky solution, however. It is hard to see any other solutions since the course in question has not been completed and a grade should not be given. Of course one could have a temporary grade assigned, pending the final work in the course. This also is tricky..."

Martin Gotfrit, SCA

"We had a recent situation here where a student was required to withdraw and lost his student loan because (through no fault of his own) he got a deferral and because he was on academic probation, the DE dropped him too low. Now if he had realized this we could have done something else but as it is such a standard practice to do DEs, no one thought of it until too late.

My advice is simple. When a student receives a DE, have the software take that course out of the averaging calculation. Thus no penalty to the student - and - should be dirt simple to do. If they fail to rectify this DE in the next semester the "F" will be averaged in or the extended deferral will maintain the balance. I suppose there may be downsides to this but I can't think of one now."

John Jones (ENSC)

"As your choice of example indicates, this can be a problem in my department.

From my point of view, a simple and painless solution would be to modify the way a DE grade affects the GPA. At present if I get a DE on a 4-credit course, my GPA is reduced by the following formula:

$$\text{New_GPA} = (\text{Old_GPA} * \text{Old_Credit_Sum}) / (\text{Old_Credit_Sum} + 4)$$

It doesn't seem like it would be an insuperably difficult task to amend the formula to:

$$\text{New_GPA} = \text{Old_GPA}$$

That is, a DE grade should not affect CGPA at all."

Jon Driver (Dean of Grad Studies)

"Deferred grades would normally be understood to mean that a student was not capable of meeting deadlines. Consequently, these would have a negative effect on the perception of a student applying for grad school. In some cases this might be justified - certainly my personal experience has been that students who can't manage their time tend to have problems in graduate school. I would suggest that we keep the current system, and that students who have legitimate reasons for DE grades arrange for a letter to be sent explaining the situation."

Summary

Minor issue

This is not a big issue – most departments did not respond.

Make DE gpa - neutral

A few departments feel that DE grades should be excluded from the cgpa. (This could be easily achieved by a table change). This would make DE equivalent to GN. The danger in this is that this might encourage students to seek DE grades to avoid or delay unpleasant outcomes, such as RTW.

Possible confusion with graduate studies policies

As the Dean of Grad Studies observes, it is likely that a student who is applying to graduate school will be adversely affected by a DE grade. This can be contrasted with graduate students, who usually have generous time allowances for the completion of research and who suffer no academic penalties in the interim, because IP is excluded from the cgpa. It is not clear if all faculty who supervise u/g research are aware of the significance of the impact of these grading policy differences for u/g vs. grads.

Advising issues

Some departments appear to cram the u/g research thesis into a semester that is already full.

Recommendations:

- 1) Departments be urged to ensure that course loads are reasonable and research can be completed and written up within the semester – otherwise splitting components of research courses between semesters is indicated.
- 2) Departments be authorized to use (at their discretion) GN grades for incomplete research or thesis work, especially if the course is graded P/W.

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