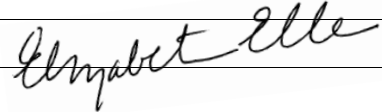


## MEMORANDUM

<b>ATTENTION:</b> Senate
<b>FROM:</b> Elizabeth Elle, Vice-Chair, Senate Committee on Undergraduate Studies
<b>RE:</b> End of the pilot of the elective grading system
<b>DATE:</b> June 2, 2023

**For information:**

The Elective Grading System pilot ends in August, 2023. SCUS does not recommend an extension of this emergency pandemic response. We recommend consultation and further study to determine whether a more broadly student-centered elective grading system, designed to support students choosing to expand their knowledge and skills in a variety of fields by taking courses outside of their program of study, would be of interest.

The attached report informed our decision and is presented to Senate for information.

## Elective Grade System Report

The Elective Grade System (P/CR/NC) pilot was initially created on an emergency basis in recognition of how the pandemic and remote learning adversely affected students. It provided a “COVID relief mechanism” for students to reduce potential negative impacts on their GPA during significant disruption to their studies. At other Universities where it is in use, the Elective Grade System option may encourage students to acquire knowledge and skills in a variety of fields by taking courses outside of their program of study without negatively impacting the students’ CGPA. However, SFU’s Elective Grade System (EGS) was not designed with this purpose in mind.

The EGS was created specifically for elective courses, defined as a course not used to satisfy the specific program requirements as listed in the Calendar (e.g. major, joint major, minor, or any combination thereof) or any Writing (W), Quantitative (Q) or Breadth (B) that is not required to graduate.

Faculties were permitted to specify courses that would be declared as ineligible for the Elective Grade standing and could permit, on a restrictive basis, the utilization of the Elective Grade System for certain program specific requirements within the 12 unit maximum. These exceptions are publicly available on the [Elective Grade System Exclusions and Exceptions](#) webpage.

The Elective Grade System policy details can be found [here](#).

### Analysis

Since Spring 2021, more than 8500 opt-ins have taken place. Students can opt-in to the Elective Grade System after the last day to self-enroll in a course. Table 1 below provides some detailed information about the number of students who have opted in for 1 or 2 courses per term, the number of students who have successfully appealed their opt-in, the number of grades (P/CR/NC) received and the percentage of students who opt-in who have a CGPA greater than or equal to 3.00, less than 3.00 or less than 2.00. A small percentage of students who opt-in to the Elective Grade System have a CGPA less than 2.00.

**Table 1: Summary of Analysis for Students Opting into the Elective Grade System**

	Spring 2021	Summer 2021	Fall 2021	Spring 2022	Summer 2022	Fall 2022
Total # students who opted into the Elective Grade System for at least 1 course	2084	930	1508	1310	672	903
# students who opted in for 1 course	78%	83%	88%	82%	85%	92%
# students who opted in for 2 courses (the maximum/term)	22%	17%	12%	18%	15%	8%
# students who successfully appealed (grade was reversed from P/CR/NC to standard letter grade)	74	14	14	17	17	27
# P grades*	1909	915	1336	1203	617	742

# CR grades*	227	64	133	147	56	72
# NC grades*	331	96	199	175	81	135
# FD grades**	3	1	0	0	0	0
% students who opted in with a CGPA $\geq$ 3.00	40%	48%	46%	43%	43%	42%
% student who opted in with a CGPA < 3.00	60%	52%	54%	57%	57%	58%
% student who opted in with a CGPA < 2.00 ***	5%	3%	5%	6%	3%	6%

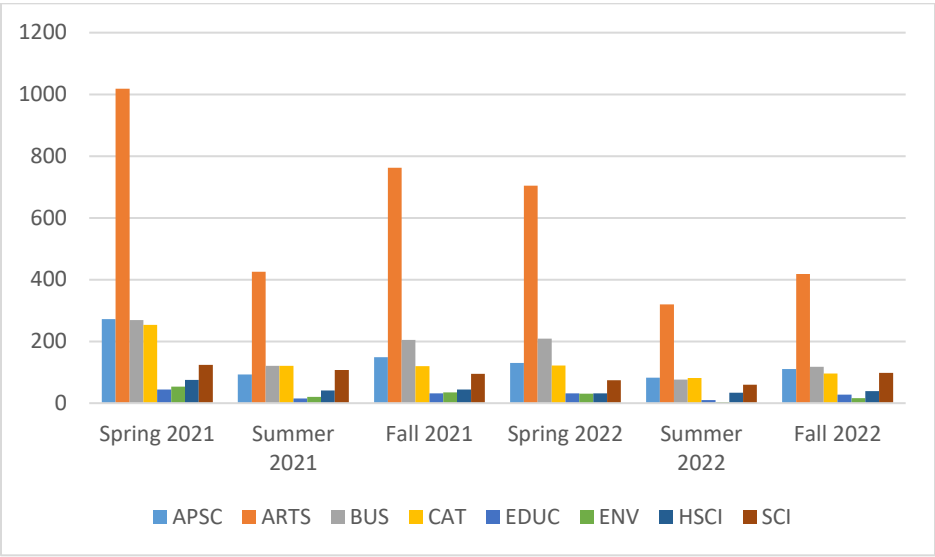
\* P is equivalent to C- or higher, CR is equivalent to D and NC is equivalent to F or N (incomplete)

\*\* Students who opt-in to the Elective Grade System and fail with discipline do not have their grade changed. It remains as FD on their Transcript

\*\*\* Students noted here are also counted in the percentage of students with a CGPA <3.00.

The Elective Grade System was very popular in the Faculty of Arts and Social Science. FASS has the highest number of students opting into the Elective Grade System as shown in Figure 1. Except for Summer 2021, FASS has the highest proportion of their students opting in (number of FASS students who opt-in/total FASS Headcount) as shown in Figure 2.

**Figure 1: Faculty Distribution of Students Opting-In by Term**



**Figure 2: Proportion of Students within a Faculty who opt-in to the Elective Grade System**

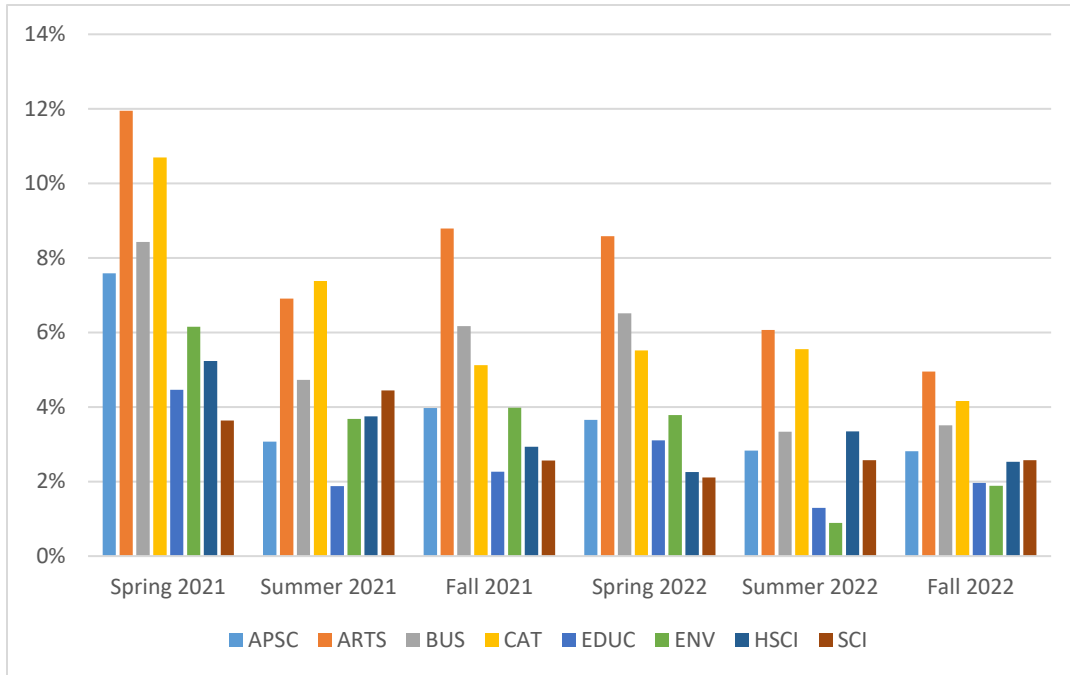


Figure 3 shows that more than 50% of all students who opt-in to the Elective Grade System, opt-in for a course outside of their Faculty. If we remove students whose primary program is a Bachelor of Arts, then more than 80% of students are opting into courses outside of their Faculty. Please note, that opting-in for a course within one’s Faculty does not necessarily mean the student has opted into a course to meet their program requirements.

**Figure 3: Proportion of Students Opting in for Courses Outside of their Faculty**

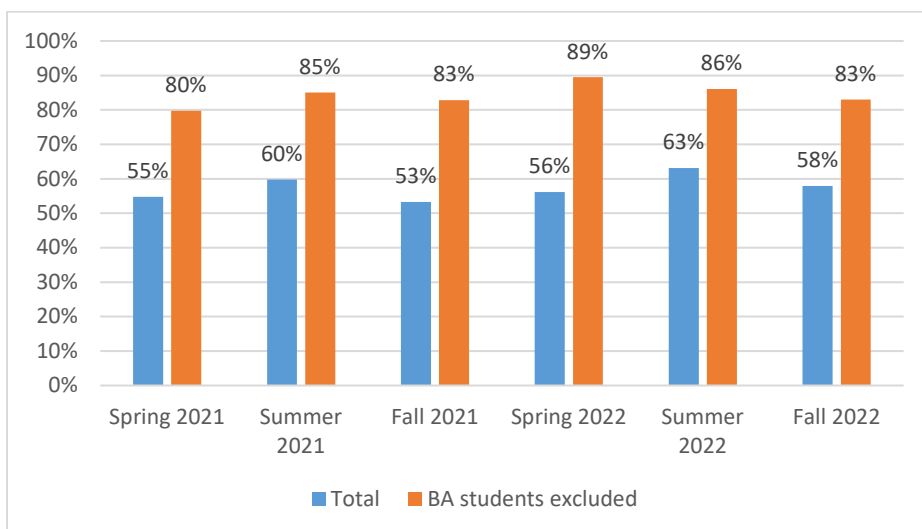
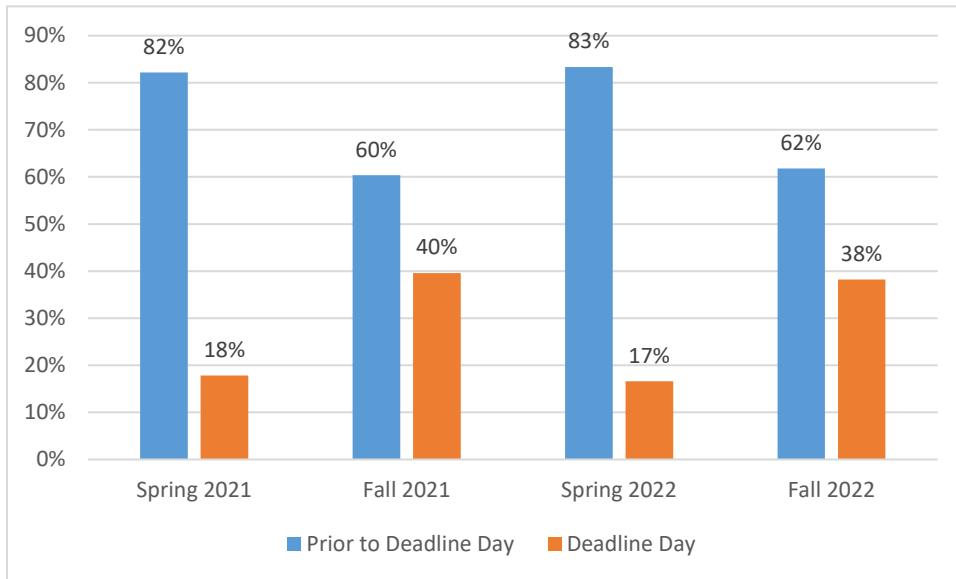
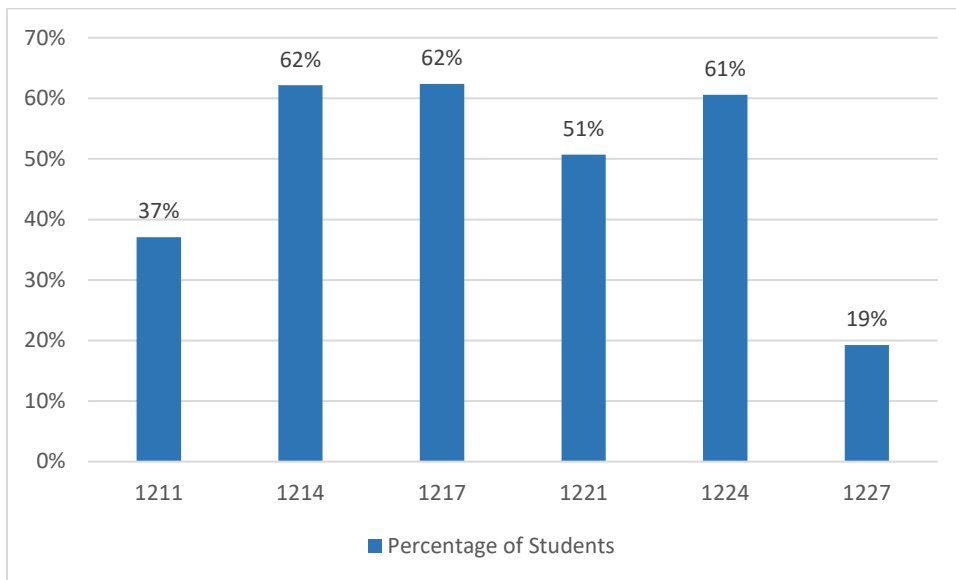


Figure 4 shows the proportion of students who opt-in to the Elective Grade System for a course prior to the deadline compared to student who opt into the Elective Grade system for their course on deadline day or the day before. Once a student opts in, they can opt-out and opt back in repeatedly until the deadline. The deadline to opt-in to the Elective Grade System is the same day as the withdrawal deadline. Many students who opt-in to the Elective Grade System early on in the term make changes throughout the term (opt-in, opt-out, opt back in etc.), some making as many as 17 changes. The percentage of students who opt-in and make changes throughout the term is shown in Figure 5 below.

**Figure 4: Proportion of Students who Opt-In Prior to compared to on Deadline Day**



**Figure 5: Proportion of Students who Make Changes to their Opt-In choices throughout the Term.**



## Summary of feedback on the Elective Grading System from the Faculties

Faculty representatives on SCUS were asked to discuss the Elective Grading System with faculty and staff in their units. SCUS was informed of the following:

- Students who are undeclared run the most risk when opting into the Elective Grade System because they may opt-in for courses that are required for their program once they have declared. These students may then request having a grade assigned, potentially several terms later.
- Some faculty have expressed concern about whether the current EGS is the best way to support student progression through their degrees, especially given personal experience with the number of students who ask to change their grades again later.
- Staff (advisors, undergraduate records, and others) are very concerned about the workload associated with this hastily rolled out program and the lack of our ability to automate it.
- Systems challenges that wind up negatively impacting students:
  - Students sometimes opt in to more than 12 units over the course of completing their program. Our systems were not designed to prevent this, and students opting in for more than 12 units were not identified due to report errors and human error.
  - When a student withdraws from courses after opting in for the Elective Grade System, they may end up with too many courses opted-in for a given term. For example, if a student is originally enrolled in 9 units, then opts in for two courses (6 units), then drops the one course they are not opted in for, then the student is enrolled in 6 units and opted in for 6 units; this would be 3 units or one course over the maximum.
  - Our systems cannot prevent students from opting in for FAL/FAN X99. These are identified by staff in Undergraduate Records and student is asked to opt-out.
- Faculty do not have access to grade change workflow if student opts into the Elective Grade System. Manual grade change forms are required. It is normally only upon a request for a grade change that a faculty member learns the student opted in.
- The variation among units in which courses are available for the elective grading system can be difficult for students to navigate, especially as many students change their minds about their major program over the course of their degrees.

Discussion at SCUS recognized that there could be benefits to an elective grading system if it encouraged students to experiment in their course choices and be exposed to different topics by removing potential impacts on their GPA. Our EGS was not designed for this purpose, but instead as an emergency response to the change in teaching modality to remote instruction. The use of the EGS suggests that students are not always making choices that are aligned with their personal goals for their major program of study, in part because their goals change over the course of their degrees. Although designed with equity in mind, the current system actually causes a burden for students because it is not robust to the level of advising required or the need to support students in flexible approaches to declaring their major.

SCUS therefore recommends that the pilot lapse as scheduled in August 2023. We further recommend that the committee, along with the Registrar, consult with the SFU community about ways to support students choosing to take courses outside of their discipline without GPA risk. This could be an EGS that is designed differently, or could take the form of recommending that Breadth courses (within our General Education program) consider being offered as pass/fail, or another mechanism.