COMMITTEE ON EDUCATIONAL POLICY
Report on Expanding Grade Options at UC Santa Cruz

To: Academic Senate, Santa Cruz Division

Currently, there is no C- grade at UCSC, largely for historical reasons. Since the institution of required letter grades, CEP has observed adverse impacts on students, and especially on student aid, stemming from the absence of the C- grade. Consequently, CEP believes that it may be time to change our grading options to include the grade of C- in the options available to faculty when issuing final grades in courses. This change would align UCSC's grading policy with all of the other UC campuses. In a similar vein, current UCSC grading policy does not include the grades of D+ or D-, and we believe these grades should also be instituted within the proposed change.

The purpose of this document is to educate Senators and solicit comments in advance of a formal proposal to amend UCSC grading policy to include the grades of C-, D+ and D-. Senators will be asked to vote on the policy change at a future Senate meeting. This document provides an overview of the issues associated with adopting a C- grade at UCSC.

Background

To receive an undergraduate degree from the University of California, a student must earn a minimum of 180 credits with a grade point average (GPA) of 2.0 or higher; satisfy general education (GE) requirements of their campus; and satisfy the requirements of their major. At UCSC, instructors may issue letter grades of A (excellent), B (good), C (fair), D (poor), F (fail). The grades of A and B may be modified by a plus (+) or minus (-). The grade of C may be modified by a plus but not a minus (see Figure 1). Grade points ranging from 4.0 to 0.0 are assigned to all letter grades and used to calculate students' GPAs. Grade points are not assigned to P (pass) and NP (no pass); these grades are not used to calculate GPAs.

Although the criteria used to assign letter grades are highly subjective, some grades carry particular significance because they directly affect a student's ability to make academic progress and graduate in a reasonable amount of time. For example, a C (2.0) is the lowest grade that satisfies course pre-requisites, major requirements and GE requirements, while a D (1.0) is the lowest grade for which a student can earn credit toward the 180-unit minimum for graduation. Instructors must therefore pay special attention when setting the cutoffs between C, D and F grades in their courses.

Federal financial aid satisfactory academic progress[1] requires a 2.0 cummulative GPA and the accumulation of 36 units (D or higher) per year. Campus regulations require that students maintain cumulative and term GPAs of 2.0 to maintain good academic standing[2].

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[1] For details on financial aid eligibility, see - http://financialaid.ucsc.edu/types-eligibility/eligibility/sap.html
[2] For details on maintaining good academic standing, see - http://advising.ucsc.edu/success/standing.html

Differences between the grading policies at UCSC and other institutions

UCSC's grading policies differ from those used at other UC campuses in several important respects.   UCSC is the only campus that does not allow faculty members to assign C- grades; all but one of our sister campuses allow D grades to be modified by a plus or minus (see Figure 2). Being regularized with respect to the other campuses of the UC system (and, indeed, most universities in general) is useful in its own right, since many students take courses at other institutions with these grading options. With that said, the existence of a C- grading option may be argued for on independent grounds as well.

Currently, UCSC faculty have a large gap in their assessment vocabulary; the current grading system prevents them from acknowledging work that falls just below the standard of acceptability for the satisfaction of prerequisites, major requirements and GE requirements. A C- grade could be used to assess work that is only slightly below this standard, but significantly better than work of failing or poor quality.

Impact of the current grading policy on UCSC students

The inability of instructors to assign C- grades has significant ramifications for UCSC students due to the large difference between the grade points assigned for C and D grades (figure 1). If a UCSC student's work is just below the C (2.0) level, his or her grade is dropped to a D (1.0); at most other campuses, they would receive a C- grade (1.7) for comparable work. This may have consequences for the student's academic record and his or her ability to graduate in a timely fashion. If the student feels the need to re-take the class for grade improvement, this will have consequences for the student's time to completion and require a greater expenditure of resources to provide seats in these classes. Finally, in many cases, a D grade that might otherwise have been a C- will bring a student under the threshold for financial aid eligibility. In other cases, it may lead to a student being barred from enrollment or being unable to declare a major. Ultimately, the lack of a C- grading option may make it impossible for some students to remain enrolled at UCSC.

Many of the same arguments would also apply to adding the D+ (1.3) and D- (0.7) grade. With the exception of San Diego and Santa Cruz, all other UC campuses allow faculty to use modifiers to the D grades. This grade could indicate a level of work that currently cannot be expressed by the grading options available to faculty here. While adding a D+ and D- may not be as urgent as adding a C-, since the drop from a 2.0 to 1.0 is more precipitous than a drop from a 1.7 to a 1.0 or a 0.7 to a 0, it should still receive consideration. Adding a D+ and D- would bring us in line with most of the UC's, it would provide faculty members with more grading options, and it would be fairer to students.

For these reasons, CEP is convinced that expanding the range of available grade options in this manner is in the best interest of faculty and students. We invite feedback from other Senators about any potential grade option changes. The committee would like to gauge whether, in light of these arguments, there is campus-wide support for adding some or all of these grade options. We would like to continue this discussion with the Senate and determine whether legislative change is appropriate and, if so, a) whether we should add any combination of C-, D+, and D-

grades, and b) whether it should remain the case that the C grade (2.0) is the cut-off between Pass and Not Passing.

Why doesn't UCSC have a C- grade option?

When the Senate decided to adopt letter grades in all courses, replacing the prior system of Pass/No Record with optional A/B/C grades, CEP at the time wrote that the C- grade was not included to "(1) to maintain the integrity of the Pass (P) grade, (2) to prevent discrepancies in the treatment of identical work depending on whether it receives a P or a C- grade; and (3) to clarify the distinction between satisfactory work and work that is technically passing but not satisfactory" (AS/SCP/1275-1). These issues can be addressed by aligning the C- grade with NP, so that the C- accumulates units but does not fulfill major, general education, or prerequisite requirements.
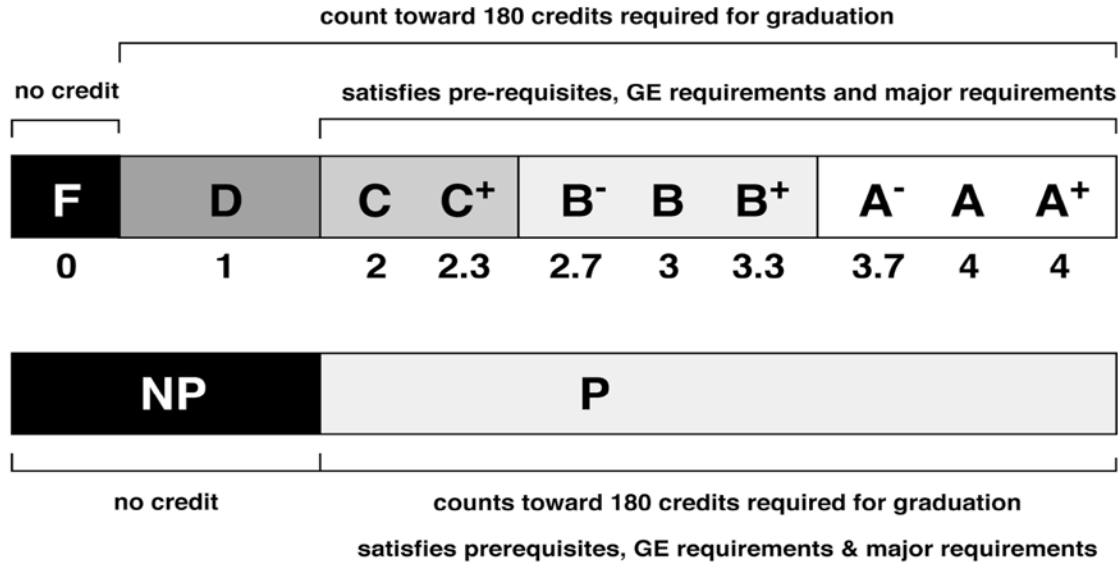
Additional historical background may be found on the Senate website.

What regulations would have to be modified to alter our grading policies?
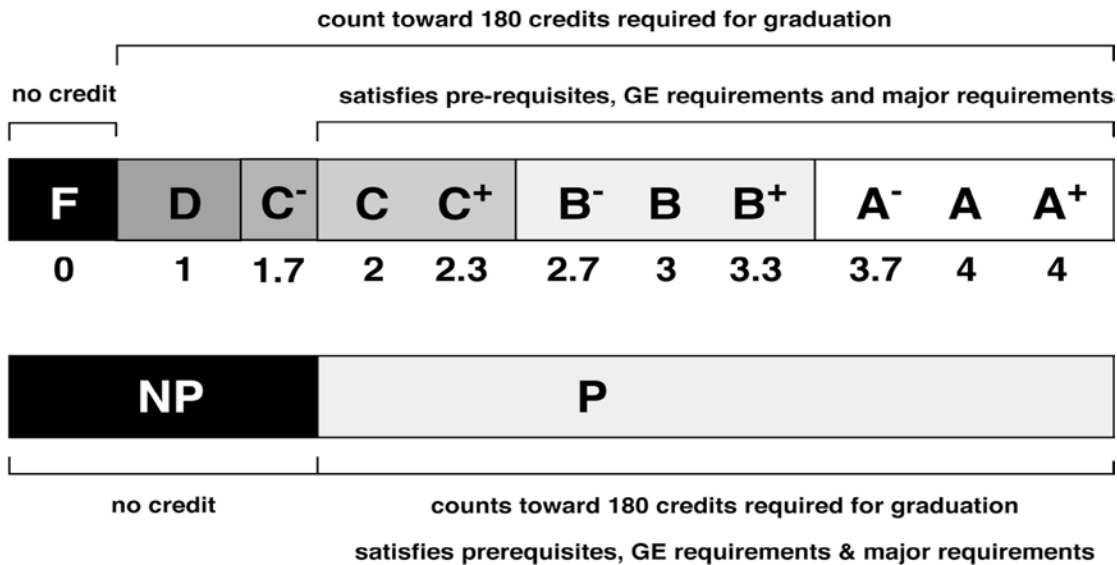
The introduction of the C- grading option to recognize work just below the level of C (2.0) would be fairly straightforward. Senate regulation 9.1.1 enumerates the grading options available to faculty; any change in what grading option can be used would have to amend this regulation. Regulation 9.1.8 states that only work which has received a grade of D, F, NP or W may be retaken. This regulation may have to be amended to include a C- grade (as well as and D+ and D-) if these grades are not sufficient for fulfilling GE requirements. Similarly, 9.4.1e and f should be changed, since it discusses how classes that are retaken for grade improvement would affect GPA. 10.1.2 discusses this issue in relation to a student's grade point average minimum as a requirement for a degree.

Assuming a C- grade is *not* to count as a Pass or fulfill GE requirements, regulations that discuss these issues need not be changed. 9.1.2 states that a grade of Pass can be awarded only for work which would otherwise receive a grade of C (2.0) or better. 10.2.2.1 and 10.2.3.1 state that only work that has been awarded a grade of P or C or better can be used to satisfy GE requirements. 10.4.8 states that students must complete all requirements for the major or minor with a grade of P, C or better.

Figure 1: Current and possible grading options
A. Current grading options at UCSC

B. Grading options under consideration*

*CEP also favors the introduction of D⁻ (0.7) and D⁺ (1.3) grading options

Figure 2: Grades At Other UC's

	Grades offered	**Minimum for Academic Credit**	**Maximum Grade to Repeat for Improvement**
Berkeley	C-, D+, D-	D-	D
Davis	C-, D+, D-	C-	D
Irvine	C-, D+, D-	D-	D+
Los Angeles	C-, D+, D-	D-	C-
Merced	C-, D+, D-	C-	D
Riverside	C-, D+, D-	C	D
San Diego	C-	D	D
Santa Barbara	C-, D+, D-	D-	C-
Santa Cruz	-	D	D

Respectfully submitted;
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATIONAL POLICY
Faye Crosby
Matt Guthaus   Max Hufft, SUA
Sean Keilen   Alicia Malmberg, SUA
Mark Krumholz   Roxi Power, NSTF
Mary Beth Pudup
Heather Shearer
Tchad Sanger, *ex Officio*
John Tamkun, Chair

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