



Grades and Grading Practices

AACRAO recently conducted a survey of its membership to determine current norms in the areas of grades and grading practices. The survey was sent to approximately 2,400 total AACRAO member institutions and 496 responses were received. Of those 496 responses, 77 were removed either because they were duplicate submissions from a single institution, the respondent did not report an IPEDS Unit ID, or the respondent reported an invalid IPEDS Unit ID. In the event of duplicate submissions, only the first response was taken into account.

Section I: Respondent Demographics

Location	Total Responses	Percent
East North Central (IL,IN,MI,OH,WI)	82	19.6%
East South Central (AL,KY,MS,TN)	19	4.5%
Middle Atlantic (PA,NJ,NY)	57	13.6%
Mountain (AZ,CO,ID,MT,NM,NV,UT)	30	7.2%
New England (CT,MA,ME,NH,RI,VT)	25	6.0%
Pacific (AK,CA,HI,OR,WA)	48	11.5%
South Atlantic (DC,DE,FL,GA,MD,NC,SC,VA,WV)	61	14.6%
West North Central (IA,KS,MN,MO,ND,NE,SD)	56	13.4%
West South Central (AR,LA,OK,TX)	31	7.4%
International	10	2.4%

Control of Institution (US Only)	Total	Percent
Public	183	44.70%
Private, not-for-profit	217	53.10%
Private, for-profit	9	2.20%

Class of Institution (US Only)	Total	Percent
2 year	97	23.70%
Four Plus Year	168	41.10%
Four Year	95	23.20%
Graduate Professional Only	47	11.50%
Other	2	0.50%

Enrollment Size (US Only)	Part Time	Part Time %	Full Time	Full Time %
Under 500	170	41.6	60	14.7
500 to 999	43	10.5	48	11.7
1000 to 2499	76	18.6	131	32
2500 to 4999	55	13.4	60	14.7
5000 to 9999	52	12.7	38	9.3
10000 to 19999	12	2.9	49	12
20000 or more	1	0.2	23	5.6

Section II: Grading System

What type of academic calendar is currently used by your institution?

Academic Calendar	Total	Percent
Trimester	16	3.80%
Other	28	6.70%
4,1,4	35	8.40%
Semester	338	81.10%
Total	417	100.00%

Which of the following best describes your current grading system?

Current Grading System	Total	Percentage
Narrative, in addition to letter or numeric grade	2	0.50%
Narrative only	2	0.50%
Numeric grades ONLY	4	1.00%
Both letter and numeric grades	10	2.50%
Letter grades with just pluses	13	3.20%
Letter grades ONLY (no pluses or minuses)	158	38.80%
Letter grades with pluses and minuses	218	53.60%
Total	407	100.00%

Changes to Grading System

The only clear trend among schools that made changes to their grading system in the past five years appears to be the addition of pluses and/or minuses to a letter grade. A total of 32 institutions moved in that direction while only 3 institutions had removed pluses or minuses.

When asked if they had plans to move to a new grading system in the next five years, the largest cadre of institutions again said that they would add plusses or minuses.

Does your institution use a 4.0 scale?

4.0 Scale?	Total	Percent
Yes, and 4.0 is the highest GPA one can earn	390	96.30%
Yes, and one can earn a GPA higher than 4.0	10	2.50%
No, we have a grading scale, but we use a different range	3	0.70%
No, we use narratives only	2	0.50%
Total	405	100.00%

Which of the following best describes your institution's policy on failing grades?

Of the 404 respondents to this question, virtually all (398) assigned and recorded failing grades in the permanent academic record and included the failure in the grade average calculation.

When determining a student's cumulative grade point average, does your institution...

GPA Methodology	Total	Percent
Calculate using only the grades earned at your institution	335	83.80%
Enter all grades including transfer work in the calculation	65	16.30%
Total	400	100.00%

Section III: Student Grading Options

Does your institution permit students to opt to take courses using a pass/fail or similar grading option?

Pass Fail Option?	Total	Percent
NO	159	39.20%
YES	247	60.80%
Total	406	100.00%

How many courses per term (quarter or semester) may a student take using this grading option?

Total Pass Fail per term	Total	Percent
One	106	43.60%
Two	24	9.90%
Three	2	0.80%
Four or more	4	1.60%
No limit	107	44.00%
Total	243	100.00%

How many courses during an undergraduate academic career may a student take using this student grading option?

Total Pass Fail per term	Total	Percent
No limit	76	30.60%
One to Three	42	16.90%
Four to Six	86	34.70%
Seven to Nine	33	13.30%
10 or more	11	4.40%
Total	248	100.00%

Are the courses that may be taken using this grading option limited to elective courses?

Limit Pass Fail to Electives?	Total	Percent
YES	151	60.20%
NO	100	39.80%
Total	251	100.00%

If you answered no, may the courses taken using this grading option be used to satisfy requirements within the major?

Pass Fail to satisfy major?	Total	Percent
Yes, on any requirements within the major	42	35.00%
Yes, only satisfy core curriculum courses	15	12.50%
NO	63	52.50%
Total	120	100.00%

What is the lowest grade a student could receive and still earn a "pass," "credit" or "satisfactory" (or equivalent) mark for a course taken using this option?

Numeric Grades	Total	Percent	Letter Grades	Total	Percent
Inst. Determines	14	53.80%	Inst. Determines	25	9.50%
Below 50	1	3.80%	D-	67	25.60%
75	2	7.70%	D	60	22.90%
70	3	11.50%	C-	51	19.50%
60	6	23.10%	C or above	59	22.50%
Total	26	100.00%	Total	262	100.00%

If a student "fails" a course under the pass/fail option, do you record the grade of "fail" or other equivalent symbol on the student's permanent academic record?

Record failures under P/F?	Total	Percent
Yes, and the mark is not included in the grade average	141	53.00%
Yes, and the mark is includes in the grade average	120	45.10%
No, the mark is not posted to the academic record	5	1.90%
Total	266	100.00%

Does your institution permit undergraduate students to register for courses on an "audit" basis?

Allow audits?	Total	Percent
Yes, and it is recorded on the student's academic record	321	82.10%
Yes, and it is not recorded on the student's academic record	38	9.70%
NO	32	8.20%
Total	391	100.00%

Can a student earn academic credit through examination for the audited course?

Allow Exam for Audit Credit?	Total	Percent
Yes	51	13.00%
No	341	87.00%
Total	392	100.00%

Are students permitted to repeat courses they have already taken at your institution to improve previously recorded grades?

Repeat for improvement	Total	Percent
Yes, but the repeated course can only be one in which the first attempt resulted in a "D" grade or lower	103	25.4%
Yes, but the repeated course can only be one in which the first attempt resulted in a "C" grade or lower	40	9.9%
Yes, but the course can only be a course required for the major	1	0.2%
Yes, but only in courses that have been failed	23	5.7%
Yes, a student may repeat any course for a better grade	223	55.1%
No	15	3.7%
Total	405	100.0%

In calculating grade averages, how do you accommodate repeated course grades?

GPA Repeat courses	Total	Percent
Only the most recent grade is included in the grade average	197	49.0%
Only the highest grades are included in the grade average (in the case of the same grade, only one is used in the average)	108	26.9%
Both efforts are calculated in the student's grade average	63	15.7%
Other	34	8.5%
Total	402	100.0%

Do you allow additional graduation credit for a course repeated to better the grade?

Credit Repeat Courses	Total	Percent
No	371	92.8%
Yes	29	7.3%
Total	400	100.0%

How many times may a single course be repeated?

Total repeats allowed	Total	Percent
Unlimited number of times	220	55.3%
Once	72	18.1%
Twice	59	14.8%
Thrice	25	6.3%
More than thrice, but still a limited number of times	22	5.5%
Total	398	100.0%

Section IV: Incomplete Coursework

Does your institution allow students to receive "incomplete" grades?

Allow incompletes?	Total	Percent
Yes, but only if majority of coursework is complete	100	24.70%
Yes, but only for substantiated medical/military reasons	45	11.10%
Yes, at the discretion of the faculty member	253	62.50%
No	7	1.70%
Total	405	100.00%

If yes, what is the deadline by which grades of "incomplete" must be resolved (under ordinary circumstances)?

Deadline to Resolve Incompletes	Total	Percent
By the end of the next full term	115	28.80%
By the end of some specified number of weeks after next term ends	66	16.50%
Some other deadline	54	13.50%
By the midpoint of the next term	44	11.00%
By the end of some specified number of weeks after the current term ends	43	10.80%
By the end of one full calendar year	34	8.50%
By the end of one full academic year	24	6.00%
Set by the professor	18	4.50%
No deadline	1	0.30%
Total	399	100.00%

If the "incomplete" grade is not resolved by the deadline, or if there is no deadline, what is the permanent grade of record?

Grade for unresolved Incomplete	Total	Percent
Failure (or equivalent symbol denoting "failure")	329	82.70%
Other	46	11.60%
Remains an "incomplete"	19	4.80%
Course withdrawal (appears on the record as a withdrawal)	3	0.80%
No record, no credit, etc.	1	0.30%
Total	398	100.00%

Under ordinary circumstances, what is the last date in a term (semester or quarter) that a student may discontinue a course without having it recorded on the permanent academic record? Please choose the response that is closest to your deadline.

Drop Date	Total	Percent
End of the first week or less	137	33.9%
End of the second week	139	34.4%
End of the third week	49	12.1%
End of the fourth week	22	5.4%
End of the fifth week	8	2.0%
End of the sixth week	8	2.0%
End of the seventh week	3	0.7%
End of the eighth week	9	2.2%
After the end of the eighth week	14	3.5%
Mid-point of the term	5	1.2%
Prior to the next term starting	3	0.7%
Always recorded (show as a course withdrawal)	7	1.7%
Total	404	100.0%

What is the time limit beyond which you will ordinarily not allow a grade change (excluding the removal of incomplete grades)? Please indicate the response that best approximates your policy.

Grade Change Deadline	Total	Percent
Not after grades are mailed	1	0.2%
Not after grades are posted to the academic record	7	1.7%
Before the end of the second week of classes for the next term	8	2.0%
Before the end of the fourth week of classes for the next term	9	2.2%
Before the end of the sixth week of classes for the next term	8	2.0%
Before the end of the eighth week of classes for the next term	2	0.5%
Before the mid-point of the next term	9	2.2%
Before the end of the next full academic term	52	13.0%
One full academic year	37	9.2%
One full calendar year	27	6.7%
No time limit	29	7.2%
No time limit, but prior to graduation	70	17.5%
No time limit, but always requires approval of academic officer (Dean or Dean's designee or above)	94	23.4%
Discretion of the professor	15	3.7%
Discretion of Dean or designee	33	8.2%
Total	401	100.0%

Section V: Repeated Courses for Grade Improvement

Are students permitted to repeat courses they have already taken at your institution to improve previously recorded grades?

Repeat course for improvement	Total	Percent
Yes, a student may repeat any course for a better grade	223	55.10%
Yes, but the repeated course can only be one in which the first attempt resulted in a "D" grade or lower	103	25.40%
Yes, but the repeated course can only be one in which the first attempt resulted in a "C" grade or lower	40	9.90%
Yes, but only in courses that have been failed	23	5.70%
No	15	3.70%
Yes, but the course can only be a course required for the major	1	0.20%
Total	405	100.00%

In calculating grade averages, how do you accommodate repeated course grades?

Repeat Courses in GPA?	Total	Percent
Only the most recent grade is included in the grade average	197	49.00%
Only the highest grades are included in the grade average	108	26.90%
Both efforts are calculated in the student's grade average	63	15.70%
Other	34	8.50%

Do you allow additional graduation credit for a course repeated to better the grade?

Credit Repeat Courses	Total	Percent
Yes	29	7.3%
No	371	92.8%
Total	400	100.0%

How many times may a single course be repeated?

Total repeats allowed	Total	Percent
Unlimited number of times	220	55.3%
Once	72	18.1%
Twice	59	14.8%
Thrice	25	6.3%
More than thrice, but still a limited number of times	22	5.5%
Total	398	100.0%

Has your institution made any changes in its repeated course policies during the past five years?

Changes to repeat policy	Total	Percent
No	345	85.2%
Yes	60	14.8%
Total	405	100.0%

Section VI: Grading Policy Issues

If your institution has several undergraduate schools, (arts and sciences, engineering, business, nursing, etc) are there different grading systems for different schools?

Different grading for schools?	Total	Percent
Not applicable (only one school at the undergraduate level)	198	49.1%
No	188	46.7%
Yes	17	4.2%
Total	403	100.0%

If your institution has several undergraduate schools, (arts and sciences, engineering, business, nursing, etc) are there different deadlines and time limits established for the school with respect to submission of grades, grade changes, make-up of incompletes, etc.?

Different deadlines for schools?	Total	Percent
Not applicable (only one school at the undergraduate level)	197	49.5%
No	187	47.0%
Yes	14	3.5%
Total	398	100.0%

Who determines grade policy at your institution?

Who sets grading policy	Total	Percent
University-wide faculty governance group	156	38.9%
Academic administration (including VP for Academic Affairs and Deans)	102	25.4%
University-wide group of administrators, faculty, and/or students	59	14.7%
School-wide faculty governance group	43	10.7%
School-wide group of administrators, faculty, and/or students	41	10.2%
Total	401	100.0%

Section VII: Academic Bankruptcy and Forgiveness

Does your institution have an academic bankruptcy or forgiveness policy?

Bankruptcy forgiveness?	Total	Percent
No, not considering one	202	49.8%
Yes	183	45.1%
No, but considering one	21	5.2%
Total	406	100.0%

Academic bankruptcy or forgiveness policy can apply if a student:

[note: respondents chose all requirements that apply. Totals are the number of times each requirement was selected.]

Academic bankruptcy or forgiveness policy can apply if a student:	Total Checks
Has obtained a certain age	3
Has not attended any other institution for a set period of time	60
Has not attended my institution for a set period of time	68
Has maintained good academic standing at this institution after re-enrollment	49
Other	60
Total	240

The academic bankruptcy or forgiveness policy is implemented by:

ABF implemented by:	Total	Percent
Keeping all courses from the previous record, but not counting them in cumulative totals	118	60.5%
Other	40	20.5%
Giving students a new start by removing all courses from a specific time period from the previous record	21	10.8%
Removing only courses below "C" (or similar grade) from the previous record	14	7.2%
Removing only failing courses from the previous record	2	1.0%
Total	195	100.0%

Section VIII: Graduation Honors

Does your institution calculate and award graduation honors ("highest honors," "Summa Cum Laude," etc)?

Honors?	Total	Percent
Yes	364	90.5%
No	38	9.5%
Total	402	100.0%

If you answered yes, please indicate the range within which a student can earn the minimum possible GPA and still receive honors.

GPA Needed for Honors	SCL	SCL Percent	MCL	MCL Percent	CL	CL Percent
Less than 3.0	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	0.3%
3.0-3.24	0	0.0%	3	0.9%	21	6.6%
3.25-3.49	1	0.3%	4	1.2%	78	24.4%
3.50-3.59	15	4.4%	59	17.8%	179	55.9%
3.60-3.69	3	0.9%	68	20.5%	18	5.6%
3.70-3.79	48	14.1%	161	48.6%	18	5.6%
3.80-3.89	102	29.9%	34	10.3%	2	0.6%
3.9 or above	172	50.4%	2	0.6%	3	0.9%
Total	341	100.0%	331	100.0%	320	100.0%

If you base the awarding of honors on a calculated grade average, what percentage of graduating students received any honors?

GPA Percent Honored	Total	Percent
More than 20%	102	35.9%
6%-10%	59	20.8%
11%-15%	54	19.0%
16%-20	48	16.9%
5% or less	21	7.4%
Total	284	100.0%

If you answered yes, please indicate the range within which a student can earn the minimum possible class rank and still receive honors.

Percent Needed CL	SCL	SCL Percent	MCL	SCL Percent	CL	CL Percent
5% or less	18	66.7%	8	34.8%	3	12.5%
6%-10%	5	18.5%	9	39.1%	9	37.5%
11%-15%	2	7.4%	5	21.7%	6	25.0%
16%20	0	0.0%	1	4.3%	2	8.3%
More than 20%	2	7.4%	0	0.0%	4	16.7%
Total	27	100.0%	23	100.0%	24	100.0%

Do you include transfer grades when calculating the grade average that determines graduation honors?

Transfer Grades in Honors?	Total	Percent
No	267	70.4%
Yes	75	19.8%
Yes, but with qualifications	37	9.8%
Total	379	100.0%

Has your institution made any significant changes in its graduation requirements in the past five years?

Changes to Grad Requirements	Total	Percent
No	328	82.0%
Yes, made criteria more stringent	51	12.8%
Yes, made criteria less stringent	21	5.3%
Total	400	100.0%

Notes and Methodology

The survey was performed by the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers over a period of time beginning on September 21st, 2004 and ending October 22nd, 2004. Respondents were limited to AACRAO members and responses were limited to one per institution. For a typical question at $z = 1.96$ (95% confidence), this survey has an approximate margin of error of $\pm 4.35\%$.

Information on demographics and enrollment were taken from the most recent IPEDS data available on the U.S. Department of Education's website (www.nces.ed.gov/ipeds). For questions, please contact Cody Brumfield at brumfieldc@aacrao.org.