

# Faculty Senate Resolution 11-20

## “A Plus and Minus Grading System for LSU”

*Introduced at the request of Professor Don Chance*

Whereas the appended background paper presents compelling arguments for the introduction of a plus and minus grading system as a means to increase the accuracy of the evaluation of students,

Therefore be it resolved that Louisiana State University shall adopt the plus and minus grading system proposed in the document below.

### **Background**

LSU currently uses the grading system of A, B, C, D, and F, which provide for 4, 3, 2, 1, and 0 points, respectively. This proposal recommends that LSU convert to a system that permits the faculty member to assign + (plus) and minus (-) grades. The proposed system would allow for grades of A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, C, C-, D+, D, D- and F.

The number of quality points for a given letter grade is obviously an important question. To provide some guidance, a survey was conducted of about 80 schools, which include LSU's peers as specified in the updated Flagship agenda program and essentially all of the most prestigious public and private research schools in the United States.

### **Alternative Systems**

Quite a few systems were identified. Some, such as MIT's five-point system, Brown's no-grade system, Maryland's system of awarding plus/minus grades but not reflecting these variations in the grade point average calculation, and Wisconsin's A, AB, B, BC system are quite unconventional and were disregarded. Of the remaining schools, 69 use some variant of the plus/minus system while thirteen use the traditional system.

The variants of the plus/minus system include

- (1) A = 4.0, A- = 3.7, B+ = 3.3, B = 3.0, etc. (39 schools)
- (2) A = 4.0, A- = 3.67, B+ = 3.33, B = 3.0, etc. (14 schools)
- (3) A = 4.0, A- = 3.75, B+ = 3.25, B = 3.0, etc. (1 school)
- (4) A = 4.0, A- = 3.667, B+ = 3.333, B = 3.0, etc. (3 schools)
- (5) A = 4.0, A- = 3.666, B+ = 3.333, B = 3.0 (1 school)

Some schools give A+. The following such systems were identified:

- (6) A+ = 4.33, A = 4.0, A- = 3.67, etc. (9 schools)
- (7) A+ = 4.3, A = 4.0, A- = 3.7, etc. (2 schools)

Some schools allow the awarding of an A+ or an A with both worth 4.0 points, although B+ is worth more than a B. This system is still treated as a plus/minus system.

Along with LSU, the schools that use the traditional system are Auburn, Georgia Tech, Carnegie Mellon, Ohio State, Texas A&M, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Oklahoma State, West Virginia, Arizona, Kansas State, Nebraska, and Oregon.

The schools that use a variant of the plus/minus system are Clemson, Duke, Emory, Indiana, Johns Hopkins, Mississippi State, New York University, Northwestern, Oregon State, Princeton, UCLA, and the Universities of Alaska at Fairbanks, California at Berkeley, Chicago, Colorado at Boulder, Connecticut, Georgia, Hawaii at Manoa, Idaho, Kansas, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Miami (Florida), Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, Nevada at Reno, North Carolina at Chapel Hill, North Dakota, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Rochester, Tennessee, Utah, Virginia, Vanderbilt, Virginia Tech, Washington University at St. Louis, Dartmouth, Georgetown, Harvard, Penn State, Buffalo, Florida, Illinois, Maine, Montana at Missoula, New Hampshire, Texas, Vermont, Yale, Arizona State, Columbia, Michigan State, North Carolina State, Alabama, Iowa, New Mexico, William & Mary, Stanford, Minnesota, Delaware, Florida State, Tulane, Southern California, Boston College, Cornell, Cal Tech, and Notre Dame.

### **Proposal**

It is recommended that LSU adopt the most-widely used system, which would provide for the following grade points:

A	4.0
A-	3.7
B+	3.3
B	3.0
B-	2.7
C+	2.3
C	2.0
C-	1.7
D+	1.3
D	1.0
D-	0.7
F	0.0

### **Benefits and Costs**

Clearly such a change is not without cost to the university. Registrar software would need reprogramming, and it is likely that some forms would need to be re-designed. Some re-indoctrination of faculty and students would be required, although the change is not particularly complex and most everyone should catch on quickly. Another subtle cost, however, is that by having more grade cutoffs, there will be more students who will be close to the next highest grade. With quality points on the line, appeals could potentially be more frequent. On the other hand, as an example, some students who might ordinarily have gotten a B might now get a B+ and will benefit.

Indeed the main advantage would be that it would provide more flexibility to the faculty member, which should be particularly valuable in graduate classes, where there is a tremendous difference in the highest and lowest A's and highest and lowest B's. It also seems likely that some graduate student grades that might have been B's will be B- or C+ or A's might become A- or B+.

Because the old system is subsumed within the new system, any faculty member could continue to use the old system.