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## Memorandum to Presidents

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Vol. 13, No. 2

**DATE:** April 30, 2013

**TO:** Presidents, State-Operated Campuses  
Presidents, Community Colleges  
Deans, Statutory Colleges

**FROM:** Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost

**SUBJECT:** *Guidance: Campus Grading Policies and Procedures*

The attached guidance is attached to assist all SUNY campuses in conducting a review of campus grading policies and procedures. The guidance, refined following input from the University community, is designed to advance academic excellence within the University by identifying and sharing best practices. Its content was informed by:

- a resolution on authority for grade changes adopted in April 2011 by the University Faculty Senate;
- a resolution adopted by the Faculty Council of Community Colleges in March 2012 to endorse the Faculty Senate's resolution on grading authority;
- recommendations of The Power of SUNY Academic Excellence Transformation Team; and
- the increasingly rigorous standards of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education and programmatic accrediting bodies; and
- other references on grading and due process procedures for students.

It is requested that all campuses conduct a review of existing campus grading policies and procedures for alignment with this guidance and to make any appropriate amendments prior to the conclusion of the Fall 2013 academic semester or as soon thereafter as campus governance processes allow. Please e-mail a link to a copy of your policies on your website once reviewed to: [provost@suny.edu](mailto:provost@suny.edu).

Questions about this memorandum may be directed to the Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost via e-mail to: [provost@suny.edu](mailto:provost@suny.edu).

Attachment

Copy: Chief Academic Officers, All Campuses  
President, University Faculty Senate  
President, Faculty Council of Community Colleges  
President, Student Assembly

## SUNY Guidance on Campus Grading Policies and Procedures

### A. Overarching Principles

1. The purpose of grades is to communicate the instructor's evaluation of student performance in terms of student learning outcomes and standards of achievement.
2. The assignment of grades based on the evaluation of student work is at the heart of an educational institution's academic integrity.
3. Authority and responsibility for assigning and changing grades rest with the course instructor of record within the context of institutional policies and procedures and consistent with the academic freedom of institutions of higher education to set standards.
4. Each campus should have its own grading policies and procedures consistent with the Policies of the Board of Trustees, Article XI, Title I, "to maintain and encourage full freedom, within the law, of faculty inquiry, teaching and research."

### B. Guiding Principles for Campus Grading Policies and Procedures

1. Campus grading policies and procedures generally should:
  - a. Be developed, reviewed and updated as part of a collaborative effort of academic administrators and appropriate faculty governance bodies.
  - b. Be consistent with campus policies on academic honesty and integrity.
  - c. Identify the full range of final grades that can be awarded on the campus, and what they mean, as well as explain how grade point averages are calculated, the grading of repeated and incomplete courses, and other special circumstances, such as grades that may be changed after initial posting due to a finding of academic dishonesty.
  - d. Clarify that grades should reflect levels of student achievement on student learning outcomes and standards presented to students at the beginning of a course in a syllabus.
  - e. Clarify that students should receive timely, formative feedback as soon as possible during a course so they can gauge their progress and have an opportunity to improve their performance before receiving a final, summative grade. Clear policy statements are encouraged.
  - f. Clarify that the instructor of record has the authority and responsibility to assign, or change, a grade because of that individual's unique position to evaluate a student's performance.

- g. Delineate clear responsibilities and timelines for students, faculty and administrators that result in timely grades for students at the end of each academic term, and clarify how long faculty should maintain academic records they use to determine grades consistent with the University's Records Retention Policy
  - h. Include a contingency for enabling other qualified and discipline-specific faculty members to assign grades, consistent with the principles of appropriate and inappropriate reasons outlined below, when the instructor of record is not available to do so in a reasonable timeframe.
  - i. Conform to the privacy requirements in the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA).
  - j. Contain due process and recordkeeping procedures for student appeals of grades.
  - k. Be readily available to the entire campus community, especially to faculty and students, online and/or in catalogs and bulletins. This applies to general grading and grade appeals policies and procedures.
  - l. Be reviewed and assessed periodically by faculty governance and campus administration to determine whether campus grading policies and procedures are followed, effective and sufficient.
2. Campus policies and procedures for grade changes should:
- a. Enable an instructor of record to make grade corrections, when errors were made, without excessive procedural steps.
  - b. Identify appropriate reasons for grade corrections or changes, which may include but not be limited to:
    - i. Demonstrable arithmetic, editing, or factual error in calculating the grade.
    - ii. Omission of assignments or parts of assignments in calculating the grade.
    - iii. A grade demonstrably based on impermissible factors unrelated to student performance, such as discrimination, bias, retaliation or retribution.
  - c. Identify inappropriate reasons for grade changes, which may include but not be limited to:
    - i. Saving a student from some academic penalty such as dismissal, probation, warning, or academic integrity problem.
    - ii. Enabling a student to graduate.
    - iii. Enabling a student to maintain academic eligibility for financial aid.

- iv. Enabling a student to graduate with academic honors, or meet some other established minima.
  - v. Personal issues unrelated to academics.
  - vi. Enabling a student to maintain academic eligibility for athletics or any other co-curricular activity.
  - vii. Managing enrollment levels in order to preserve programs or revenue, or to increase retention rates.
- d. Set specific timeframes for each step of student grade appeals, which may include extensions for extraordinary circumstances.
- e. Explain that student grade appeals will not be accepted from third parties, including parents.
- f. Clearly outline the steps in the grade appeal process, starting with a formal document of appeal filed by the student with either the instructor of record or the department chair or equivalent, and culminating in a final determination by the campus that is consistent with the principles, policies and procedures included in this document.
- g. Include a contingency for enabling other qualified and discipline-specific faculty members to change a grade, consistent with the principles of appropriate and inappropriate reasons outlined above, when the instructor of record is not available to do so in a reasonable timeframe, or when the instructor of record has assigned or changed a grade based on inappropriate factors, or in exceptional circumstances involving administrative review of a grade.
- h. Require official communications about grade appeals to be sent to students by registered mail with a return receipt or by another written or electronic method for which delivery confirmation is available so there is a record of delivery, and have a method for notifying appropriate faculty members.
- i. Require documentation for each grade change that includes the reasons for the change and personnel involved in making the change, with such documentation stored and available to all parties permitted by law for a time period consistent with the campus's records retention policy and its cycle for reviewing and assessing its grading policies and procedures.

### C. References

- Association of University Professors, *Grading* (Undated).  
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- Association of University Professors, *Resources on Grading* (Undated).  
<http://www.aaup.org/AAUP/issues/grading/ResGrading.htm>

- Association of University Professors, *Statement on Professional Ethics*, American (2009 Revision).  
<http://www.aaup.org/AAUP/pubsres/policydocs/contents/statementonprofessionalethics.htm?PF=1>
- Association of University Professors, *Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities*, (Undated).  
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- Euben, D., *Who Grades Students? Some Legal Cases, Some Best Practices*, Association of University Professors (November 2001).  
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- Council of Graduate Schools, *Preparing Future Faculty – Preparing to Assess Student Learning* (Undated). <http://www.preparing-faculty.org/PFFWeb.Resources.htm#preparation>
- New York State Education Department, *Regulations of the Commissioner of Education regarding Standards for the Registration of Undergraduate and Graduate Curricula*, Section 52.2(e). <http://www.highered.nysed.gov/ocue/52.2.htm>
- Middle State Commission on Higher Education, *Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education: Requirements of Affiliation and Standards for Accreditation* (March 2011 revision). <http://www.msche.org/publications/CHX-2011-WEB.pdf>
- Stevens, E., *Due Process and Higher Education: A Systematic Approach to Fair Decision Making*, ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report (Vol. 27, No. 2), Washington, DC: The George Washington University, Graduate School of Education and Human Development. (1999).
- SUNY Academic Excellence Transformation Team, *Academic Excellence Transformation Team Report* (April 2011).  
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- SUNY Faculty Council of Community Colleges, Academic and Student Affairs Committee, *Motion to Endorse the UFS Resolution on Grading Authority* (March 31, 2012).  
[http://www.fccc.suny.edu/resolutions/11\\_12/ASAMotionGrading\\_Authority.pdf](http://www.fccc.suny.edu/resolutions/11_12/ASAMotionGrading_Authority.pdf)
- SUNY University Faculty Senate, *Resolution on Grade Change Authority* (April 16, 2011).  
<http://www.suny.edu/facultysenate/158-04-1ResolutiononGradeChangeAuthority.pdf>