

**Faculty Senate Meeting
February 21, 2012**

Admission and Retention Policies Committee
The Plus/Minus Grade Policy

Beginning this coming fall semester, faculty will have an opportunity to assign grades that include pluses or minuses. Faculty Senate resolution #07-03, approved by the Chancellor October 25, 2007, provides this opportunity to create a more precise indicator of student achievement.

Passing grades will range from D- to A. Failing grades still receive zero quality points toward the calculation of GPAs. D- is the lowest passing grade, with a value of 0.7 quality points; D carries 1.0 quality points; and D+ is worth 1.3 quality points. A letter grade of C- equates to a 1.7; the C is still 2.0; and the C+ is 2.3. This pattern is the same for B-, B, and B+ (2.7, 3.0, 3.3). A- is worth 3.7, and A equals 4.0. There is no A+.

Having more gradation in reporting student success is one of the most important reasons ECU is moving to the plus/minus system: under the current A, B, C, and D grade scale, minor differences in performance can translate into substantial letter grade differences. The coming plus/minus system allows for minor differences in performance to result in minor differences in letter grades. Another benefit of adopting plus/minus grades is that this is the kind of system most used across ECU's peer group of universities (10 of 15), and is a common standard, not only across the UNC system (it is used by 10 of the 16 universities), but also across American institutions. The change to the grade system was deferred four years from the Chancellor's approval to allow all current students the opportunity to graduate under the same grade scale under which they entered.

Benefits of the policy include opportunities for students to differentiate their achievements. Under the old grading system, students performing at the lower end of the B scale received the same number of quality points as those who were performing in the high-B range. While the introduction of A- may make keeping a 4.0 somewhat more challenging, the change to a Plus/Minus Grade System will not have a dramatic effect overall on GPAs. Research at Wake Forest University and other institutions illustrates that on average, grades changed by a few one-hundredths of a point, and not all in the same direction. Furthermore, research suggests that a plus/minus system reduces the impact of any grading inaccuracy.

In addition to these benefits, faculty are better able to pinpoint students' effort and to have all work in the class affect students' grades. Nearing the end of the semester, under the old system, some students can become somewhat entrenched in the middle of a letter grade range, so that late-semester assignments and exams have little or no effect on their grades. The Plus/Minus Grade System can reward these students for continuing to make efforts at the end of the semester, because their additional work can be rewarded.

Note: this announcement is adapted from the Proposal to Move to a Plus/Minus Grade System, available online at <http://www.ecu.edu/cs-acad/fsonline/customcf/committee/ad/rationale.htm>. View this document for more information and to see graphics reflecting the soon-to-be-implemented grade scale at ECU and grade point scales at peer institutions.