

31 October 1996

MEMORANDUM

TO: Members University Senate

FROM: University Senate Council

RE: AGENDA ITEM: University Senate Meeting, Monday, November 11, 1996. 3:00 PM FOR DISCUSSION ONLY. Grading Systems.

Background:

**A Chronological History of +/- Grading Systems at the University of Kentucky**

Pre-1970

Senate approves College of Law +/- grading system.

1978

Senate approves College of Architecture +/- grading system at May 2, 1978 meeting.

1982

Senate approves of Landscape Architecture Program +/- grading system at October 11, 1982 meeting.

1983

A university-wide proposal for +/- grading is forwarded to the Senate in 1983 and returned to the Admissions and Academic Standards Committee.

1984

A university-wide +/- grading system proposal is denied by the Senate at the April 1984 meeting.

1989

A university-wide +/- grading system proposal is denied by the Senate at the March 20, 1989 meeting.

### 1990

Senate approves of College of Fine Arts +/- grading system at April 23, 1990 meeting.

### 1994-95

During the 1994-95 academic year, the Admissions and Academic Standards Committee considers a College of A&S proposal to establish a plus/minus grading system for undergraduate students in that college. After deliberations, the committee recommends that the change be instituted on a university-wide basis rather than in just the college of Arts & Sciences. Plus/minus grading is already in use in the colleges of Law, Fine Arts, Architecture, and the Landscape Architecture Program.

### April 1995

At the April 10, 1995 Senate meeting a general discussion is held. Debate ensues regarding instituting the +/- system for all University undergraduate students, as well as solely in the College of A&S. No clear consensus is achieved.

### October 1995

At the October 9, 1995 Senate meeting, the proposal is again discussed and the following concerns raised:

1. Issues of equity
2. If there was no designated A+ grade, the best students may be less likely to earn 4.0's. (This concern was confirmed by experience of Shippensburg University of PA, who adopted a +/- grading system in 1992.)
3. Weakest students may be more likely to fall below 2.0 GPA's.

The Senate Council returned the proposal to the Senate Council for further study.

### December 1995

In response to the Senate's directive, the Senate Council seeks additional input by sending the proposal to the deans of undergraduate colleges asking that faculty councils or comparable groups review it. The request specifically asks that they consider the advisability of a University-wide plus/minus system for all undergraduate students. The memo invites student input from the colleges as well. A separate request is made to the Student Government Association.

### February 1996

The Senate Council reconsiders the proposals for a university-wide system and the College of A&S system at its 19 and 26 February meetings taking into consideration the following input:

- Discussion at previous Senate meetings
- SGA's October 1995 petitions and January 1996 Kernel survey
- Internet assessment of other universities' experiences
- Responses from 10 University of Kentucky Colleges (see attached)
- Research-based data from Dr. Tom Guskey and Dr. Roseann Hogan

The Senate Council acknowledges that those currently using a +/- grading system are satisfied, but concludes that there is no compelling rationale to recommend instituting such a system university-wide. The Council believes, however, that the original proposal forwarded by the College of A&S should be brought back to the floor of the full Senate for a vote.

#### April 1996

Following the Senate action in March, 1996, supporting the A&S proposal, the College of Communication and Information Studies College Advisory Council unanimously requests that their College be added to the list of those wishing to have plus/minus grading. The proposal is accepted by the Chair of the Admissions and Academic Standards Committee as an extension of the earlier debate. The Senate Council recommends the proposal and the Senate approves at the April meeting.

#### October 1996

The Colleges of Social Work and Human Environmental Sciences forwards to the Senate Council proposals for a +/- grading system patterned after that of the College of A&S. The proposals are accepted by the Senate Council as extensions of the earlier debate and forwarded to the Senate which denies both proposals at the October 14, 1996 meeting. A motion is passed for the Senate Council to revisit the entire issue of +/- grading.

At the October 28, 1996 Senate Council meeting, the idea is approved of holding a series of discussion-only sessions for +/- grading system at the November and December Senate meetings in an effort to arrive at a clear and educated consensus on this issue. The consensus of the Council is that no motions be allowed during these sessions and that spokespersons representing various sides, both faculty and students, be invited to present.

**Results of Poll on +/- Grading System**  
**Conducted by Senate Council Chair Gretchen LaGodna**  
*February 1996*

- College of Social Work  
Faculty supports a university-wide +/- system
- College of Allied Health Professions

Faculty Council reports “not much support” for the concept, but if established, they believe it should be university-wide

- College of Engineering  
Student view is negative and this view is supported by faculty
- College of B&E  
Majority of faculty polled were opposed to +/- grading system
- College of Agriculture  
Student Council strongly opposed. Faculty response mixed by majority support. All were opposed to adding an A+ category.
- College of Nursing  
Faculty Council indicated majority of faculty support
- College of Human Environment Sciences  
Faculty voted to support, but recommend no use of D- or A+ categories. Suggest that the pluses be at the .5 level and minuses at the .7 level.
- College of Communication  
Faculty Council in support, only if university-wide and with no A+
- College of Education  
Departments were equally divided between opposition and support
- SGA  
Survey in Kernel revealed 235 students opposed and 43 supporting.