

Revision of Board of Governors' Statute 2.34.07 on Grading Policy

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Board of Governors revise Statute 2.34.07 on Grading Policy effective fall term 2022, specifically in sections regarding the assignment withdrawal grades. Specifically, it is recommended that the marks of WF, WP, and WN be discontinued and replaced in all instances with the grade of W for all active students.

Current Policy

According to the current Board of Governors statute 2.34.07.190 through 2.34.07.250, students may request to withdraw from a course during the official withdrawal period noted on the Schedule of Classes. Students will be issued one of the following grades:

- a) WP: Withdrawal with a passing grade earned to date
- b) WF: Withdrawal with a failing grade earned to date
- c) WN: Withdrawal with no basis for a letter grade, non-attendance

Procedurally, a student submits a withdrawal request through their Academica portal. That request is then sent to the faculty member for the course withdrawal to be approved by the selection of a WF, WP, or WN or denied.

Issues Caused by Current Policy

Racial/Ethnic Disparities:

In review of all submitted WF grades for the winter semesters from 2016 until 2020, it was observed that there are significant disparities by ethnicity for students given WF grades. When comparing WF rates for all student against the WF rates for distinct populations, Black students are disproportionately overrepresented. In Winter 2020, Black students were overrepresented by 10.4% whereas white students were underrepresented 11.9%. Looking at other populations who are overrepresented, the next highest group was 2 or more races at 2.4% and Hispanic or Latino at 1.9% for Winter 2020. Additionally, it was observed that for the Winter 2020 term, Black students represented 14.8% of all grades reported but 24.5% of WF grades reported.

Professional Programs:

For students interested in pursuing professional or other health science degrees, several programs calculate a WF grade as a true F. An example of this is the American Dental Education Association, which notes "grades and credit hours for all FAILED courses will be included in the ADEA AADSAS GPA, even if they are not included in the GPA calculations of the transcript-issuing institution. Failed courses are courses with grades of F and WF". Other examples of this practice occur within nursing, physician assistant programs, and all centralized application systems do not use a grade replacement policy, meaning WF would be calculated as an F. This results in WSU students having a lower GPA calculation at the time of application than they expected and can negatively impact their competitiveness for admission to professional programs. Students applying from other institutions with a traditional "W" withdrawal grade that does not indicate pass or fail status do not have those withdrawals calculated into their GPA, but the grades are still visible on the transcript.

In addition to application for professional programs, the appearance of a WF on a transcript can cause harm to a student in any situation where their transcript is requested including applications

for scholarships, internships, and employment. Considering there are problematic disparities in the overrepresentation of WF grades earned by marginalized communities, continuing to include WF on transcripts would assist in perpetuating discrimination or limited opportunities for students in this population in their professional journeys beyond WSU. In review of all 4-year public institutions in Michigan, Wayne State University is the only research one institution to issue a withdrawal grade beyond a standard “W”.

Financial Aid:

When a student withdraws from all courses, the Office of Student Financial Aid is required to calculate the amount of earned aid based on the date the student has requested the withdrawal. This process must be completed within federal Title IV aid deadlines. By requiring faculty approval for a withdrawal to be granted, this can create a delay in the calculation if a faculty member does not approve or deny the withdrawal in a timely fashion. A delay can cause WSU to be out of compliance with the Financial Aid regulations. This is a highly regulated and audited process. Violations can trigger fines and risks our federal aid program participation.

Faculty Approval of W Grades:

The rationale behind faculty approval for a withdrawal was so that faculty could intervene with students in an attempt to help them plan a path towards course completion instead of students deciding independently to withdraw. In reviewing withdrawal data for every semester from 09/2019 through 09/2021 however, on average only 1.95% of withdrawal requests are denied by the faculty, implying that only in rare circumstances does an outcome differ from the student’s-initiated request for withdrawal. Also, Wayne State is the only one of Michigan’s four-year institutions to require faculty approval for withdrawal.

Proposed Revisions

We propose that the distinguishing of WF, WP, and WN be removed from grading policy and be replaced with a standard W grade for all withdrawals. This requires deleting sections 2.34.07.210 and 2.34.07.220 of the Board of Governors statute 2.34.07. Further, we propose the requirement of faculty to issue a grade in Pipeline (a system no longer utilized), be removed. This requires deleting section 2.37.07.240.

Specifically, we propose the following changes, by section:

2.34.07.060

When a course is repeated, credit is only granted once. The last grade and credit hours for a repeated course are used in computing a student's grade point average and for awarding credit hours applicable for a degree even if lower than the previous grade. However, a grade of "~~WP~~" (~~Withdrawal/Passing, no credit~~) or "~~WF~~" (~~Withdrawal/Failure, no credit~~) "W" or "I" (Incomplete, no credit) will not replace a previous grade or credit hours for a course. All attempts to take a course will be recorded on a student's transcript, whatever the last grade and credit hours awarded may be.

2.34.07.190 Withdrawal Policy

The Withdrawal Policy is revised as it applies to both undergraduate and graduate grading. ~~Students should be informed that they are responsible for notifying the instructor of the exact date of withdrawal from class.~~

2.34.07.200

The mark of "W" is given when a student ~~reports the withdrawal to Registration and Scheduling in accordance with University policy.~~ voluntarily withdraws from a class during the official withdrawal period for that class as denoted on the Schedule of Classes. Students will initiate their withdrawal.

2.34.07.210

~~If a student decides not to go to class after having received a grade for any component of a course, these grades will be issued ONLY as follows:~~

~~a) WP: Withdrawal with a passing grade earned to date.~~

~~b) WF: Withdrawal with a failing grade earned to date.~~

2.34.07.220

~~WN: Withdrawal given to student when there is no basis for a letter grade. The "WN" grade replaces the "X" grade.~~

2.34.07.230

The official date of withdrawal will be noted in each case.

2.34.07.240

~~The faculty member shall issue the grade on Pipeline as soon as the student initiates the withdrawal process. Grade sheets will be available on Pipeline as soon as the drop/add period is over.~~

2.34.07.250

Grades of W (WP, WF, WN) are not used in calculations of grade point averages.

Approvals

This recommendation was approved by the Academic Senate and the Provost.