

UNIVERSITY COUNCIL
ACADEMIC PROGRAMS COMMITTEE
REQUEST FOR DECISION

PRESENTED BY: Len Proctor, Chair, Academic Programs Committee of Council

DATE OF MEETING: March 15, 2012

SUBJECT: **Academic Courses Policy: late withdrawals from courses and Withdrawal Failure (WF) grade comment**

DECISION REQUESTED:

It is recommended:

That Council approve a change to the academic courses policy to prevent late withdrawals from courses and delete the Withdrawal Failure (WF) grade comment.

PURPOSE:

University Council approves revisions to university policies relating to academic courses.

SUMMARY:

Over the last several years, the university has worked to simplify and streamline its grading systems. The purpose of this change is to simplify grading practices when a student leaves or abandons a course.

At present, there are three different practices when a student abandons a course – a Withdrawal (W) when a student drops a course before the Withdrawal deadline (Nov. 15 and March 15 for term courses, Feb. 15 for two-term courses); a failing grade and Withdrawal Failure (WF) grade comment when a student withdraws from a course after the Withdrawal deadline but before the examination period begins; and a failing grade and Incomplete Failure (INF) grade comment when a student does not complete the course requirements or misses the final exam.

The proposed change prevents late withdrawals from courses and eliminates the Withdrawal Failure grade comment. A student who abandons a course after the withdraw deadline would simply receive a failing grade and Incomplete Failure (INF) grade comment after they do not complete course requirements or miss the final examination. Students who abandon their courses due to catastrophic personal circumstances can still appeal to their college for retroactive withdrawals.

The Academic Programs Committee discussed this policy change at its February 29, 2012 meeting and agreed to recommend approval to Council.

ATTACHMENTS:

Chart showing changes to the Academic Courses policy and memo of January 30, 2012 from Russ Isinger, Registrar.

Proposed Revisions:

University of Saskatchewan Academic Courses Policy on course delivery, examinations & assessment of student learning

Policies	Rules and Procedures	Revise to	Rationale and impact
2. Examinations			
c) Final examinations			
ii) Final examination period and scheduling of final examinations			
	Warning about withdrawal: Once the final examination period for a term has begun, students cannot withdraw from courses.	Warning about withdrawal: Students cannot withdraw from courses after the academic penalty deadline for a given term	This change will simplify grading decisions for students and for instructors. It prevents late withdrawal from courses
3. Student assessment issues and special circumstances			
a) Final grade alternatives and comments			
	Definition: ... Final grades recorded as percentage units may be accompanied by the following additional grade comments as warranted: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • aegrotat standing (AEG) • incomplete failure (INF) • withdrawal failure (WF) • deferred final examination granted (DEFG) • special deferred final examination granted (SPECDEFG) • supplemental final examination granted (SUPPG) • supplemental final examination written (SUPP) • special supplemental final examination granted (SPECSPG) • special supplemental final examination 	Delete <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • withdrawal failure (WF) 	This change eliminates the Withdrawal Failure grade comment. Students who abandon the class after the Withdraw deadline (Nov. 15 or March 15 for term classes) will receive an Incomplete Failure (INF) after they do not complete course requirements or miss the final examination. Students who experience catastrophic personal circumstances after the Withdraw deadline can appeal to their college for a Retroactive Withdrawal and

	written (SPECSUP)		the transcript would be changed to show the course as a W (Withdrawal)
c) Withdrawal failure			
<p>If a student withdraws from a class after the withdraw deadline, this is indicated on their transcript as a Withdrawal Failure.</p>	<p>Withdrawal Failure is a grading alternative which appears permanently on a student's transcript as a WF. This can impact the calculation of a student's Cumulative Weighted Average.</p> <p>The grade comment WF will be accompanied by an assigned percentage grade which factors in a grade of zero for any remaining coursework and the final examination. Even if such an assigned grade results in a passing final percentage grade, a final failing grade of 49% will be recorded along with the grade comment of WF (Withdrawal Failure).</p> <p>College of Graduate Studies & Research: The College of Graduate Studies and Research has higher passing grade thresholds for its programs than do undergraduate courses. The grade comment WF will be accompanied by an assigned percentage grade which factors in a grade of zero for any remaining coursework and the final examination. Even if such an assigned grade results in a passing final percentage grade, a final failing grade of 59 % will be recorded along with a grade comment of WF (Withdraw Failure)</p>	<p>This description will be deleted.</p>	<p>Section (e) which defines Incomplete Course Work (assignments and/or examinations) remains in effect.</p>

TO | **Academic Programs Committee**

FROM | **Russell Isinger, Registrar and Director of Academic Services**

SUBJECT | **Elimination of the Withdrawal Failure grade comment in the Academic Courses Policy**

DATE | **January 30, 2012**

After discussion with the Associate Deans and the academic advisors of the colleges, it is our recommendation that s.2.c.ii of the Academic Courses Policy, under Warning About Withdrawal, be amended to state “Students cannot withdraw from courses after the academic penalty deadline for a given term.”, and that s.3.c of the Academic Courses Policy, which outlines the Withdrawal Failure (WF) grade comment, be deleted, effective May 1, 2012.

Prior to the introduction of the SiRIUS student information system in May 2005, students could withdraw (and fail) from courses at any time after the academic penalty deadline for a given term right up until the day of their final examination. With the introduction of SiRIUS, a decision was taken that in consultation with the colleges that once the final examination period for a term had begun, students could no longer withdraw from courses. The Academic Courses Policy reflects this decision, and SiRIUS enforces it.

Due to this change in 2005, for students in three credit unit courses where the academic penalty deadline is November 15 or March 15, there is a just under three week window for students to withdraw, fail, and earn a WF grade comment in their course (for a six credit unit course where the academic penalty deadline is February 15 the window is longer, but the number of six credit unit courses is diminishing every year). The resulting failing grade, however, is essentially the same as a student who, after the final examination period begins, simply chooses not to complete the course and earns a grade comment of Incomplete Failure (INF). So both students receive a calculated failing grade and a grade comment which indicates that the failing grade was due to failure to complete the course.

In discussions with the Associate Deans and the academic advisors, a consensus was reached that as the result was essentially the same in both cases – failure in the course due to failure to complete – it made more sense to prevent students from withdrawing after the academic penalty deadline and have one grade comment – INF – cover all situations of students failing to complete the course. It was also felt that being prevented from withdrawing from the course might serve to focus some students’ attention to the extent that they might bear down and work harder, seek out available academic or other counseling or help, and perhaps they might in fact end up passing the course.

As well, the actual assignment of the WF grade comment in SiRIUS causes some confusion for instructors and staff, as the comment is not automatic and has to be manually placed on the student’s record as part of grade entry. Every year Registrarial Services staff clean up quite a few student records where passing grades have the WF grade comment attached, and where withdrawals have occurred after the academic penalty period and no WF grade comment is attached. Eliminating the WF grade comment will eliminate this confusion and the cleanup that results.

It should be noted that this change will in no way affect the ability of students who fail to complete a course for reasons beyond their control (for example, due to illness, a disability, a death in the family, or similar medical/compassionate reasons) to appeal to their college to have their grade changed to a Withdrawal (W), a grade that has no effect on their average or progression. In order to be more transparent about academic and financial appeals, Student Central Support Services will be launching a new appeals channel in PAWS to coincide with this change in the Academic Courses Policy, if approved, and will be widely communicating about the change.

I look forward to a discussion of this proposal at the next Academic Programs Meeting.

Yours respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Russell Isinger". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping 'R' and a long, sweeping 'I'.

Russell Isinger

University Registrar